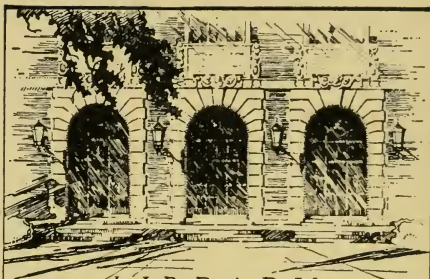


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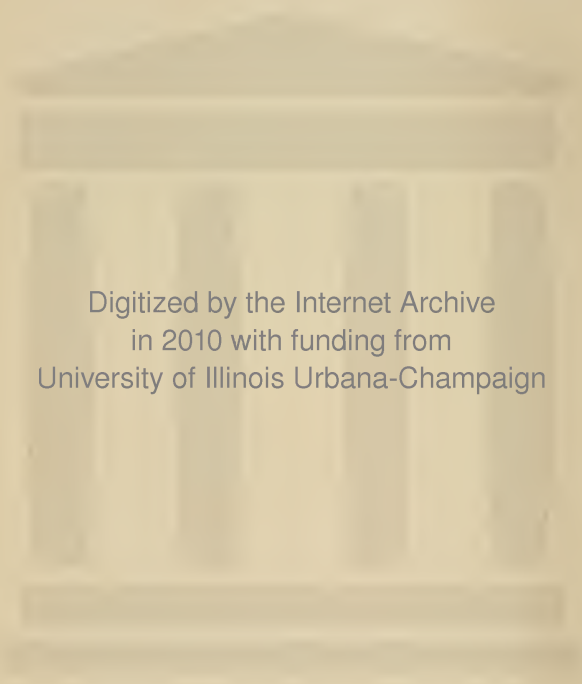
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ZÉRO:

A STORY OF MONTE CARLO.

Quintin D'Hume
1884.

ZÉRO:

A STORY OF MONTE CARLO.

BY

MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED,

AUTHOR OF "AN AUSTRALIAN HEROINE," "MOLOCH," "NADINE."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON: CHAPMAN AND HALL,

LIMITED.

1884.

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R CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR,
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Inscribed

TO MY HUSBAND

IN AFFECTIONATE ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF THE WARM SYMPATHY AND INTEREST

WITH WHICH HE HAS ENCOURAGED

ME IN ALL THAT I HAVE

WRITTEN.

See New Reg 53 July 56 Mr. Chapman = 2 v.

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ZÉRO:

A Story of Monte Carlo.

CHAPTER I.

THE "DANSE MACABRE."

IT was the last day of the old year. Here, in Monaco, there was glorious sunshine, the sky sapphire, the sea like an amethyst; a touch of mistral in the air, which set the eucalyptus trees rustling and the palms waving, enhancing the clearness of outline and vividness of colouring, and bringing to all but the hypochondriac and the invalid a sense of freshness, buoyancy, and delight in mere animal existence.

At three o'clock, however, there were but few people on the terrace or in the garden of the Casino. Most of the visitors at Monte Carlo — except those inveterate gamblers to whom the most dulcet melody could not equal in attraction the whirring of the *roulette* cylinder and the chink of gold—were assembled in the theatre, where the afternoon concert of instrumental music was in full progress.

The orchestra was playing the opening of St. Saën's weird *Danse Macabre*, when George Warrender entered the crowded room and walked up the side gangway. Almost every chair was occupied. A great many strangers had come over from Nice and Mentone. The programme was a medley of modern compositions, even more attractive than that offered upon the "classical Thursdays." Many musical faces among the audience wore a look of luxurious enjoyment and calm expectancy of a rich pleasure; but at Warrender's appearance

there were several backward glances of half subdued annoyance, which made him unwilling to brush past till the piece was over. He halted, and then drawing to one side waited, standing by the closed doorway nearest to the stage.

He was a noticeable figure against the gorgeous but sombre background. A very tall man, broad in proportion, with a look of alertness and self-reliance, sallow cheeks, square forehead, flexible characteristic lips, and a most peculiar and touching expression of earnestness in his brown steadfast eyes.

An Englishman of thirty or thereabouts, but with something of a foreign look—Spanish, Mexican, West Indian—one hardly knew whether to ascribe it to nationality or long sojourn in such distant parts, which faded upon familiarity with the face, leaving only a doubt as to what his calling in life might be. He was evidently not a soldier, in spite of his

somewhat military bearing, nor a sporting country gentleman, though his bronzed face gave token of exposure to sun and wind, while no one would for a moment suspect him of being a mere idle pleasure seeker. He had certainly followed some occupation or object—you fancied a little out of the beaten track—with the keenest interest. There was just sufficient peculiarity and lack of self-consciousness in his dress and air to suggest some absorbing pursuit, and to give him the stamp of travel in strange lands.

The *Danse Macabre* is a curious piece of music. It is full of trouble and of wild, almost repellent passion. Its burthen seems to be of madness, despair, death; its refrain, an uncertain wail, broken by abrupt chords and fantastic cadences.

At one period the violins send forth a plaintive moan, resembling that of a lost spirit in vain seeking rest; at another, the

melody — dirge-like, mysterious, laden with unutterable woe—thrills the ear; and again changes into a rapid measure, grotesquely horrible, almost Satanic in its presentment of unholy revelry. The music, in its wonderful transitions from the quaintly frolicsome to the pathetic and morbidly terrible, its complex developments and shifting phases of beauty and almost discord, might be likened to the phantasia of life itself. Perhaps no composition is capable of exercising a more subtle influence upon its hearer, more especially in the case of a temperament strung to sensibility, and labouring under conditions of sorrow or mental excitement.

As the forces of Nature insensibly pave the way for physical revolutions, so with ourselves, certain crises in existence, brought about by unrecognised agents, seem preceded by a sense of doubt and expectancy, a feeling of strangeness and awe, which cause the

most trifling events to appear momentous, and an accident of conduct or surrounding to be fraught with ominous import.

Thus with Warrender. He was disappointed, unhappy, at variance with the world and with himself. His melancholy was of the kind which, weary of cherishing the diseased offspring of morbid thought, craves for distraction, and longs to throw off its burdens; not the deep-seated sort which absorbs all outward accessories into its inward weight of care. Reaction had set in. He thirsted for the stimulus of an interest against which his finer senses should not rebel. His mood was plastic. A new impression might now become an indelible imprint. Passion once awakened, could not slumber again. It unconsciously sought a new object.

The condition of things favoured the birth of fresh sensation. Is not the very name

Monte Carlo like a whiff of some intoxicating draught? Here may be found *Nepenthe*, acting so subtly, that memory, instead of being merged in blank oblivion, evokes visions of the past from which the sting has departed, but which, like the noblest creations of art, are etherealised by a halo of melancholy. At this moment, though the music seemed in a manner to intensify his sadness, it aroused exciting, nay, pleasurable anticipation. He felt himself upon the brink of adventure. Novelty, rebound after deep depression, vague tumult, and an odd feeling of personal remoteness, gave subdued charm to the situation.

The dim stage, with its tiny star-like lamps; the bowed figures of the performers; the strange shapes of the instruments, seemed no more real than a picture at which he might have been abstractedly gazing. The almost human crying of the violins and 'cellos

sounded like some voice from a far country, making utterance in a language unintelligible to his faculties, yet powerfully affecting the spiritual part of his nature. The sense of bewilderment deepened within him and confused his vision. The great room incrustated by gilding, with its glittering chandelier and floridly ornamented ceiling; the painted figures of scantily-draped women contrasting with the white uncanny masks sculptured here and there upon the walls; the cosmopolitan audience, every face of woman, man, and maid thrilling the beholder with romantic speculation, each one telling its own story of sin, sorrow, or mere animal phlegm—the heated atmosphere weighted with patchouli, frangipani, and cigar smoke; the faint murmur from the vestibule bearing echoes of artificial mirth—all combined to strike him with a phantasmagoric effect; so that the scene might have been a vision, and existence a dream, in which the weary

heart-aching, ever present for weeks past, was lulled or forgotten.

But the moment for drama had arrived. Suddenly his nerves were strung to alertness. His mind became clear of mists. Life was no longer a dream or a spectacle seen through dissolving clouds. A new and vivid consciousness pervaded his being—its cause, the striking profile of a lady, who, seated at the inner end of a row of chairs upon the opposite side of the theatre, drew his eyes as a magnet draws steel.

Warrender bent eagerly forward. His look flashed intelligence. He moved his position till no head intervened between his eyes and the object of their regard.

The lady, lovely, disdainful, self-absorbed, sat perfectly motionless in her corner, her gaze absently fixed upon the orchestra.

"Varuna !" exclaimed Warrender half aloud ; then added, as though repenting the involuntary familiarity. "It is Madame Fano."

Though he had never before seen this woman in the flesh, her photograph was well known to him. Madame Fano was the half sister of Helena Kilsyth, the girl he loved, whose refusal to become his wife had driven him to Monte Carlo in search of a moral opiate or counter-irritant to pain.

Near Madame Fano were two vacant chairs, one in the line behind, at an angle with her own; by her side, another, which she retained by covering it with her shawl. Warrender, as soon as the music ceased, crossed over and took possession of the former unappropriated place.

The *Danse Macabre* concluded the first part of the programme, and was followed by the usual rush back to the gaming rooms. Men who had been sitting apparently wrapt in dreamy enjoyment of the music, now glanced round keenly, and rose as if awakened to a sense of pressing business. A soft-eyed Italian, who, from her refined features and inspired

expression, might have been the muse of poetry, hastily gathered up her properties from the seat which she had occupied immediately in front of Warrender, and bustled down the narrow gangway. The sounds from the Casino grew louder as the heavy doors were swung open. Soon the theatre was almost empty; with few exceptions, only representatives of the respectable British element remaining. Though hardly thus to be characterised, Madame Fano was not lured from her place by the attractions of *roulette* or *trente et quarante*. She maintained her immovable attitude in the corner, though the people sitting next her quitted their places.

Thus it happened that she and Warrender were left in solitary occupation of their respective rows. For several minutes she remained in the same position, and he had ample opportunity for closely studying her features.

They were clearly cut, refined, and of almost Grecian regularity—statuesque was the term

which best described the face. It was very cold, even hard, when in repose, but it was the sort of face that might be supposed to indicate the capacity for strong feeling. Madame Fano looked as though she had lived her life, so far intensely, but had somehow missed the most thrilling experience of womanhood. Her complexion was pale though the lips were rosy; the brows delicately arched; the hair brown with a reddish lustre. Its smooth coils were surmounted by a small velvet *toque*. She was dressed in black. A tightly-fitting mantle of some rich stuff moulded her shapely shoulders. A diamond brooch fastened the lace at her throat. In her bearing, dignity, listlessness and intense inward pre-occupation blended curiously with an expression of restrained eagerness. "Cold, ego-tistic, passionless," were the epithets which arose at the first glance. "Impulsive, enthusiastic, finely susceptible," said the more prolonged scrutiny.

Her gaze, ere it wandered to the entrance door in search of the companion whom she apparently expected, met that of Warrender for a moment. Assuredly, in the photograph which ornamented Helena Kilsyth's writing table, scant justice had been done to Madame Fano's eyes. But how inadequately, during the course of half an hour's conversation, are conveyed the subtleties of an expressive countenance! What an impossibility, therefore, that they should be rendered in the brief space of time employed upon a sun picture! Here was presented food for a thousand conjectures. Was Madame Fano unhappy, or only yearning for happiness? Had she drunk the dregs of interest, or did she sigh for the draught tantalisingly withheld? Was she indifferent to life, or was it that life seemed to her too momentous to be merged in these surface frivolities? What was the meaning of that dangerous gleam agitating the dark depths; and why did an element of fierceness combine with

a softness and dreamy tenderness which left nothing to be desired in the matter of womanly charm?

The person for whom Madame Fano was waiting had not yet appeared. It seemed to Warrender that the grey orbs were darkened and dilated by inward impatience. He still looked, admired, and wondered. But now Varuna's eyes were removed from the entrance door; and in the withdrawal they again rested upon Warrender's face. This time for longer. Her gaze seemed compelling, and forced his imagination into fresh play. It was deliberate, questioning, yet also, at once regal and wistful. It might have been that of a queen, mentally appraising the will and ability of a subject to do her bidding; or it might have been that of a woman in difficulty or distress who fancied that in a stranger's face she discovered signs of the sympathy and aid she needed. Involuntarily, and as if in answer to her appeal, Warrender made a slight motion forward. Then,

for an instant, the faintest blush rose upon Madame Fano's pale check. Her lashes drooped; her lips curved in an expression of disdain. She half rose as though with the intention of leaving her place, appeared to hesitate, at last subsided into her corner with eyes steadily averted. Thus for some moments she remained.

Suddenly in an eager undertone, he heard her murmur a single word.

"*Treize.*"

The syllable seemed to fall unconsciously from her lips, and to startle her as though it had been uttered by another person. Was it he himself who had spoken? He almost imagined so for a second, when he saw her turn, and noted the inquiring flash of her eyes which accompanied the gesture. Her weary indifference had vanished. It was as if she had been awakened from reverie by a voice she knew. Again she repeated low, but clearly,

"*Treize.*"

Now she grew restless. Her hands, which had been lying motionless, fidgeted with the fastening of her cloak. Presently she drew off her glove, and took from an inner pocket one of those cases common at Monte Carlo, made to contain a certain amount of gold. She emptied out the coins, carefully counted and replaced them, and for a minute appeared lost in calculation.

People were re-entering the concert-room. The musicians had returned and were arranging their instruments. There was a rustle of silk by Warrender's side ; and a lady whom he also recognised from having seen her portrait, swept past him and seated herself in the chair which Madame Fano had been reserving.

Even had he been unaware of any relationship, the likeness between the two would have told him that they were mother and daughter. Their features were almost identical, but Mrs. Kilsyth did not possess that air of dignity and self-restraint which was noticeable in Madame

Fano. Her smile was infantine and uncertain ; she had a quick, almost frightened way of changing the direction of her gaze ; her dress was careless in spite of its richness ; her lips were but half-closed, and belied a certain intensity, which made her eyes remarkable. She was restless in her movements, and neither her countenance nor her limbs appeared ever to be in a state of repose, except when she became, as it were, conscious of something to be guarded against in her demeanour, and compelled her features into an expression of almost unnatural quietude.

She bent excitedly towards Madame Fano, and whispered loudly enough for Warrender to hear the words distinctly :

"They were playing the *Danse Macabre* a few minutes ago ?"

"Yes, mother."

Mrs. Kilsyth sank upon the seat next her daughter and gazed dejectedly into vacancy.

“I came to the door intending to join you,” she went on in an agitated voice. “But when I heard *that* music I was obliged to go away again. Do you remember the last time they played it here? De Renzi was the conductor. Cazalette sat yonder. I can see his eyes now as they watched you. There are faces which haunt one, and his could not be forgotten. That was five years ago.”

“You are wandering, mother. They have performed that piece many times since!”

“But *I* have not heard it. I have watched the programmes, and upon such occasions have avoided this part of the Casino. That night the very air seemed heavy with something imminent. It was all madness, fever, tumult! Don’t look at me so strangely. The bare recollection of some things excites me. You know what Dr. Frederick Holt said, when he put me in his great chair, and looked me through and through, ‘Madam, your temperament is your curse.’ Oh,

that I were one of those good and happy people who eat, digest, and sleep ! Varuna, there is something strange in the moral atmosphere to-day."

"You find it so ?" asked Madame Fano, composedly. "I think that you are right. Fate is hovering over us. The music has affected me also. I remember the night you speak of. It was the night but one before—before I gained my freedom."

"Hush !" said Mrs. Kilsyth wildly, though still almost in a whisper, "you mustn't talk of freedom, it's only slaves who speak of freedom. Of course *we* are free. But listen !" she laid her hand upon her daughter's arm, and continued impressively, "Varuna, I am in despair. Your dream last night was the whisper of a lying prophet. One hundred and twenty times did I stake on 34, the hundred and twenty-first, I had the louis between my fingers—I knew that the number was coming up ; but the hand of fatality

held my will. I could not lay the coin down. You know how it is with me, the inspiration comes, and with it a sort of numbness. I tried the *trente et quarante* room. Fatality again! I was simply playing against the tables. A run of nineteen on black. And the Greek was dealing! Can you account for it? I have never yet known you dream falsely. You have lost me ten thousand francs to-day."

"The day is not yet finished," replied Madame Fano calmly.

"But my purse is empty. I dare not draw again on Bernhardt's. I can play no more unless you will lend me a few napoleons."

"No," said her daughter, sadly yet firmly. "Our bargain must be strictly kept. You are too excitable. If I had once begun to lend you stray napoleons, we should both have been ruined long ago."

Mrs. Kilsyth held up her hands with a wild, dramatic gesture. "Oh, how cold you are!

how calculating ! You haven't the least warmth, or spontaneity in you !" she exclaimed in the tone of one who utters lightly-weighed reproaches. "Great Heavens !" she continued rapidly and with gathering excitement. "To think of all that I have sacrificed for you, while you are blind, unconscious as a stone ! There's a spell upon me. Just as I was about to stake again, when, had I acted upon my inspiration I should have recouped all my losses, Lord Bretland came up and spoke to me. The devil was in his tongue. 'Do you know that Cazalette is to be here immediately ?' he said. I faltered ; the louis fell from my hand—then, '*Rien ne va plus.*' It was the voice of destiny. My chance was gone. Varuna, did you dream of Cazalette last night ?"

Madame Fano started. Her face changed perceptibly. "Mother," she whispered in her sweet but incisive tones, "remember that there are people round us who do not understand your

strange way of talking. What do you mean? Is Cazalette coming here?"

"Next week. Lord Bretland saw him in Paris. He inquired if we were at Monte Carlo. Varuna, let us leave this place for a time. Let us go to Cannes, Florence, Rome—anywhere that would not mean stagnation. I am tired. I have lost so much of late, my nerves are out of order. I want change of scene and occupation. We will come back when Cazalette has gone, and bring luck with us. Then I can pay him my debts."

"You owe him money?" exclaimed Varuna.

"Oh a trifle. Don't speak of it. But that man is the herald of misfortune, I am certain that some calamity will happen to us if we stay here."

"We cannot leave Monte Carlo now, mother, I have strong reasons for wishing to remain. You refused to winter in Rome, when I urged it not long ago—and now—it is too late. Why do you want to avoid Cazalette?"

Mrs. Kilsyth did not answer.

Madame Fano looked at the elder lady keenly, inquiringly. "Mother," said she in a whisper, but not so low as to be inaudible to Warrender, who was also able to note the deep sadness of her manner, "it would be the blind leading the blind were I to take you away from Monte Carlo. We are like creatures who can only inhabit one element. We both want to escape from ourselves. Where can we do that so effectually as here? And just now, I could not live anywhere else." She spoke vehemently, then continued more gently, "It is not for me to tell you that if your nerves are shaken, the fault is partly your own. You should not be afraid of wakeful nights. They are terrible; do I not know that? But not more terrible than the price you pay for drug-bought sleep. In this state of mind and body your brain conjures up phantoms; your dread of Colonel Cazalette is one of them. I have more cause than you to

shrink from the past, of which he reminds me. But see, *I* do not flinch. Granted that he has a sort of evil fascination over weak women ; let us stand firm and defy him. We will go back to the *roulette* room, mother. Have some faith in me still. You shall see me put my inspiration to the test."

"Is it a number?" asked Mrs. Kilsyth eagerly. "The tables are bewitched. You are safe in trusting the wildest fancy. But I beseech you, Varuna, do not run the risk of staking with your own hand. Have you no lovers here to-day? Where is Alec Fordham? Or there is Wrentzel——"

Varuna's lips curled. "That was a half-hearted adoration. To-day he is the Princess Titchakoff's shadow."

"Then St. George—surely there was never man more attracted. But for the last few days, Varuna, you have been unlike yourself."

Madame Fano made no reply to this

observation. The band was playing a crisp, precise *gavotte*, by Corelli, a passionless piece of harmony, full of quaint *roulades*, delicate *appoggiaturas*, and carefully premeditated affectations. At its conclusion both ladies left their places; and Warrender, full of curiosity and amazement, followed them to the Roulette Salle.

CHAPTER II.

NUMÉRO TREIZE.

IN the second gaming-room the crowd was at its height. The atmosphere was fetid. The heavy ornamentation and Moorish tracery on walls and ceiling seemed dulled with the haze of human breath. For pervading sounds there were the subdued hum of voices, the tramp of feet upon the parquet, the chink of coin, the whirling of the cylinder and rattling of the marble, all melting into a low indefinite roar, broken at intervals by the level calls of the croupiers.

Nowhere than at Monte Carlo does the social sea present a more glassy surface. There is something grotesque and revolting in

this outward serenity. It resembles the deadly quietude of a beast lying in wait, or the treacherous smoothness of a quicksand when it has closed over its prey.

Whatever horrors teem below, the uninitiated observer beholds only stoical indifference or light frivolity—a show in which the performers seem actuated by no more intense purpose than aimless search for amusement, or the thrall of habit which has become boredom. It needs the magnifying glass of a vivified consciousness to show forth the greed, sensuality, unappeasable craving for stimulus to jaded sensation, depravity of spirit, and deep despair, concealed under tense muscles, painted cheeks, and artificial smiles.

All this was but vaguely felt by Warrender: the scene bewildered him, while he was yet sensible of a faint feeling of disappointment. If here life were at high pressure, the tragedy masked itself by an affectation of phlegm. He

had not been long enough at Monte Carlo to have become habituated to the strange concentration of interest which compelled this vast assemblage into one narrow groove of occupation too momentous for any outward show of excitement. The scene seemed to him an apt illustration of destiny in its operations upon the tide of human affairs. It affected him somewhat in the same manner as the sight of an Eastern opium den, in which all, drugged into unnatural calm, in respective stages of uneasiness or beatitude, tread an imaginary path leading to a fictitious goal of bliss, and are indifferent to every actuality of life save the poisoned influence of the hour.

Lines three or four deep, of almost every variety of the social creature, pressed thickly round the *roulette* table. The outer rows, English principally, had come over from Nice or Mentone, salving conscience by the pretext of music, and taking pleasure in the reflection

that they were now in a position to moralise from personal observation upon the debasing effects of legalised gambling. These were for the most part spectateurs, except when now and then a more frisky matron or adventurous miss laid down a five-franc piece upon the even chance, and watched the result with an anxiety and pantomimic show of satisfaction or disappointment, as the coin was raked up or doubled, which contrasted curiously with the imperturbable demeanour of those in the inner circle to whom loss or gain meant perhaps the serious question of existence. Here, jostling each other, were representatives of every type and nationality. A Russian prince flung down his notes royally upon the colours side by side with a fresh-faced Oxonian, who ruefully beheld one small pile after another swept away from the dozens. An English countess, the patrician calm of her delicate face marred by an expression of

unlovely triumph, gathered in her winnings over the shoulders of a be-rouged, bejewelled hag, whose bony fingers were in their turn occupied in a judicious placing of louis upon various numbers. An innocent fair-haired girl, leaning over her husband's chair, touched shoulders with a Parisian beauty of doubtful reputation. A so-called "great lady," florid of face, broad of proportions, in a tight-fitting cloth costume, and with a well-stuffed reticule at her belt, imperiously directed the lean, sallow-faced, high-bred looking man who accompanied her, where to lay the notes which she lavishly supplied. Seated before her, the lowest type of sharper—unshorn, unkempt, haggard, and bleary-eyed—carefully pricked his card, playing cautiously and pocketing a fair proportion of his gains, while he threw an occasional glance of contempt towards an emaciated, worn-out libertine opposite, whose trembling hands and reckless play indicated the stage of desperation.

Here, a member of the so-called Fraternity of St. Vincent de Paul watched his opportunity to pick up and cherish any foundling stake left exposed by the carelessness of its owner. There, a withered crone begged boldly for a five-franc piece wherewith to try her luck for the price of a dinner and a night's lodging. The lady appealed to, whom Warrender perceived at once to be Mrs. Kilsyth, took out her purse. It contained a single coin. This she placed in the claw-like hand, adding a word of gratuitous advice.

“Try the first dozen. Low numbers are coming up.” Then she turned to her daughter and said in her inconsequent manner, “Poor suffering humanity! Who could refuse to give a wretched woman five francs; but my generosity has robbed me of my only chance of bearding fortune this evening.”

Madame Fano was silently and intently watching the game. The withdrawal from the

table of a now penniless gambler created a rift in the crowd and brought Warrender to her side. Without moving a muscle, she seemed to become aware of his proximity, and, after a moment, turned directly upon him that glance of inquiry which had startled him in the theatre. He was certain that she meant to speak to him; and so strongly had she seized upon his thoughts, that the evident intention awakened in him no surprise. For an instant she hesitated; then, in silvery neutral tones, addressed him in French:

“Would Monsieur have the great kindness to place this stake upon *numéro treize*?”

She held towards him a *rouleau* of gold. It was the maximum allowed upon any single number.

Warrender replied in English, with cold politeness: “With pleasure, madame,” and was stretching forth his arm, when Mrs. Kilsyth interposed:

“Not this moment. Let my poor specimen of humanity have her chance. One would not beggar oneself in charity and nullify the gift. There,” as the number was proclaimed. “Five. I felt certain she would win. If I had staked that coin myself, fifteen, twenty, or anything else over the dozen would certainly have turned up. Well, there is consolation in the thought that I have done a kindness to one even more unfortunate than myself.” She heaved a deep sigh.

“Now,” said Madame Fano, pointing towards the table.

Warrender leaned forward and put down the gold as he had been directed. There was a faint murmur among the players, and several pairs of eyes wandered round till they rested upon Madame Fano’s face. Warrender observed that three or four altered their stakes. He knew instinctively that Varuna’s gaze was fixed not upon the table but upon himself. An

intense excitement caused his pulses to tingle. The moment had become dramatic. He felt that he was the instrument of fate.

The wheel revolved, the ball rattled into its compartment. "*Rien ne va plus*," was uttered in the croupier's automatic monotone—a moment—"Treize. Noir. Impair et Manque."

Many eyes turned again towards Varuna. She was still looking at Warrender, and stood perfectly quiet, very pale, and with lips tightly pressed together. She did not appear embarrassed by the attention she excited. Three or four of the players smiled significantly, shrugged their shoulders, and became again absorbed in calculation, while several of those standing watched her with quickened interest, evidently prepared, should she continue playing, to follow her lead. Her cool venture seemed to betoken invincible luck, or an infallible system which placed her above the sport of chance.

Warrender waited while louis and five-franc

pieces were being meted variously to the coins scattered upon the cloth. A swift, penetrating suggestion turned him hot. He was ashamed of his agitation—ashamed of the pleasurable triumph with which he placed a little mass of gold and several crisp notes in Madame Fano's hand. He had fancied that a smile at least, would reward his success. But, to his disappointment, she bestowed upon him no such mark of gratitude. Her eyes did not even meet his, as in a few formal phrases she expressed her cold thanks. With a stately bow, she moved away, and after a few moments he saw both mother and daughter pass out into the vestibule.

Presumably, they had quitted the Casino. Warrender lingered for a short time, not playing, for strangely enough, he felt no inclination to back further his own or Madame Fano's luck. But her shadow lingered near him. The manner in which she influenced his imagination

was unaccountable, yet a fact impossible to ignore. The other men and women in the room were no more to him than a crowd of lifeless, painted automatons. She alone seemed of flesh and blood. She alone stimulated his faculties.

Nevertheless, the inward debate which she aroused was by no means to her advantage. Unfamiliar as he was with the type she might be supposed to represent, he had always held the vice of gambling in abhorrence. How much more so when exhibited in the person of a woman—in that of Helena Kilsyth's sister ! Could he imagine Helena herself breathing the corrupt atmosphere which surrounded the *roulette* table ? He shuddered at the thought. And yet he had heard her speak of her mother in terms almost of adoration—of her sister with the warmest enthusiasm.

He was obliged to admit that Madame Fano's bearing and style of beauty were at total

variance with the life she seemed to be leading. Was it to be supposed that she was a mere slave to her mother's passion for gambling? No. The conversation he had overheard proved that she shared the propensity, and also that both were victims to the most degrading superstition. Had Varuna's augury been based upon a dream of the night before, upon a conjunction of dates, or upon the ticket which had been handed her in lieu of her umbrella? Or—and he remembered the enigmatical look which had been turned upon him—was it possible that he himself was connected with her inspiration, and that some fateful pre-sentiment had prompted the choice of him as her deputy? Her mode of addressing him forbade the supposition that she recognised him from hearsay or description as her sister's friend; and however unconventional might have been her conduct, her haughty dismissal showed plainly that she repented the action,

and was aware that it might lay her open to misconception.

With his mind still full of these thoughts, he too left the gaming rooms. Upon the steps leading down to the square, he was accosted by a very pretty, very stylishly-dressed, hot-house-flower-like young lady, to whom an acquaintance of his own—a good-looking man, elderly, well got up, and blending in his person the stamps of Bohemianism and fashion—was devoting himself with languid relish.

“Well, Mr. Warrender,” said the lady, “and who would have dreamed of seeing you in this naughty place? How long have you been here?”

“About two hours,” replied Warrender, returning the greeting, it must be confessed with some doubt as to the identity of his interlocutor. But it was dispelled by her next words.

“When last I heard of you, you were

supposed to be excavating buried cities in Peru—oh, Mexico? Thank you, Lord Bretland, I knew that it had something to do with Prescott and Pizarro; but, as you have more than once remarked, we Australians are apt to be a little casual. That is because of the immensity of the country, you know: it affects our ideas. Still, for a barbarian, you must admit that I am teachable.”

“For a barbarian, your taste in dress, and your appreciation of the niceties of advanced civilisation, are something quite—quite extraordinary,” observed Lord Bretland, in his dry, halting manner, which gave the impression of a vast fund of thought that it was undesirable to communicate.

The young lady laughed, and met Warrender’s look of vague interrogation with a quizzical smile.

“Now, confess that you don’t in the least know who I am. I’ll give you three guesses

at my name, the penalty to be paid in twelve-button gloves, six and a quarter, mind, and Swedish kid"—she held up her slim, daintily cased hands. "In the meantime, while you are cudgelling your memory, we'll take a turn in the Gardens, for even my passion for *roulette* won't enable me to endure the atmosphere of the Casino for more than half-an-hour straight off."

"Does your vanity, Miss Crosbie, allow you to suppose that my memory requires stimulation?" asked Warrender with somewhat forced gallantry. "I have the most vivid recollection of a picnic in Ullagong Scrub, and of the kneading of a damper on a sheet of bark by those very fingers. Upon a former occasion, when I had the pleasure of seeing you, you were haranguing your father's electors upon the advantages they would derive from supporting the Dead Lock system; and the time before that you were good

enough to give me lessons in playing the Jew's-harp."

"Oh, spare me the shame of all these reminiscences. Civilisation has done wonders for me. My husband began my education in Australia. Lord Bretland is continuing it at Monte Carlo. There, you have lost your bet, Mr. Warrender. Did you imagine that I was following the example of your American friends, and travelling round Europe all on my own hook? If you will come and dine with me this evening at the Hôtel des Anges—and, by the way, you'll see a good many angels there, only I'm afraid some of them have fallen from the starry spheres—I'll introduce you to General Featherstone, and to some one much more attractive, if you haven't already made her acquaintance."

"Ah, yes, that I can answer for," said Lord Bretland. "Not half-an-hour ago I saw Warrender lay down the maximum on *numéro*

treize, and hand Madame Fano the winnings. You hadn't your eyes about you, Mrs. Featherstone."

"Well, if I was blind, some one else used their eyes—and to considerable purpose! I must say that you haven't wasted any time, Mr. Warrender. But I advise you not to be too reckless. Do you know that Madame Fano is called the Vampire? Ghoulish, isn't it? But her uncanniness lies in her conduct rather than in her person, as no doubt you have discovered for yourself."

"I have discovered nothing," replied Warrender—but though he spoke stiffly, there was an inflection of eagerness in his voice, which Mrs. Featherstone was quick to notice—"except that Madame Fano is a very charming-looking lady, whose greatest peculiarity appears to be that of liking to play *roulette* at an inconveniently crowded table, and to whom my long arm was of some slight service this afternoon."

“A peculiarity which a good many people here share,” said Mrs. Featherstone. “Come, I don’t believe in all this haphazard business. You had better make a clean breast of everything, Mr. Warrender, or confess at once that this is not the first time you have staked for Madame Fano.”

“It is perfectly true, Mrs. Featherstone, that I have never seen Madame Fano before to-day,” said Warrender coldly.

“By the way,” interrupted Lord Bretland, “you will remember our meeting at the Kilsyths’? We went with the Abbey party to the Militia Ball at Hallingford in July. You must have been as horrified as I was, to hear of poor old Sir John’s death.”

“Sir John Kilsyth dead!” echoed Warrender, pausing suddenly, his face pale and disturbed. “What do you mean? I have heard nothing of it. You know that I left England three months ago—rather more, I

believe. I have been in the back woods of America out of reach of newspapers."

"Then, where have you turned up from now?"

"From Paris; I was one night in England. Tell me when did this happen, and how."

"His horse rolled over him in the hunting-field the first run of the season, two months ago. Poor old Sir John! A bit of a Puritan, and not equal to marching with the times—but what a splendid old fellow he was! It is a sad thing for his niece, though I am told that she always resented not having been placed under her mother's guardianship. Mrs. Kilsyth has her turn now. Well, I hope that Miss Helena will not develop the family mania."

Warrender was silent. A rush of painful thought and bitter recollections effaced the vivid impressions of the last few hours. Once more his mind was filled with the image of

Helena Kilsyth. Serene, pure, majestic, to associate her with these surroundings seemed profanation. Her name choked him. What right had he to show any anxiety? He was too proud, too self-conscious to ask questions which might betray the wound she had inflicted. He turned abruptly to Mrs. Featherstone—

“You were speaking of Madame Fano?”

“Perhaps I had better profit by that little hint, and discreetly hold my tongue, since you appear to be on terms of intimacy with her sister. Lord Bretland, your diplomacy has been rather thrown away. Mr. Warrender and I are old friends, and don’t need to stand on ceremony with each other. What is the mystery? Is he going to marry Miss Kilsyth, or was his great-aunt a distant cousin of Monsieur Fano’s grandmother? By the way I hear that Colonel Cazalette is to appear in the scene shortly; I mean to ask him how Madame Fano disposed of a troublesome encumbrance.

I am convinced that he is in all Mrs. Kilsyth's secrets, for the old lady becomes more mad in manner than is even her wont whenever his name is mentioned. I am not at all satisfied that Monsieur Fano himself mixed his night draught. An overdose of morphia is such an easy way of accounting for sudden death."

Lord Bretland laughed a little awkwardly.

"Ah, ye-es—do you think so?" he said in his negative interrogative fashion. "It would take a great deal to kill Mrs. Kilsyth. I've seen her swallow half a bottle-full of laudanum straight off—fact, I assure you. She is a little queer at times. I have always accounted for it in that way."

Mrs. Featherstone looked steadily at Warrender with her audacious blue eyes.

"You see, I haven't spent two winters at Monte Carlo for nothing. That's the worst of this place ; it upsets all one's nice notions about human nature. No one is mildly wicked here."

“Is it insinuated that poor Madame Fano poisoned her husband?” asked Warrender. “The biography of this lady promises to be interesting. Pray continue, Mrs. Featherstone. My acquaintance with Miss Kilsyth does not entitle me to become the champion of her family.”

“Well, let us sit down,” said Mrs. Featherstone, placing herself upon a bench, and indicating by a slight motion of her arm that there was room for Warrender at her side. “Did you ever see such a glorious evening? The colouring of the water reminds me of Sydney Harbour, and I declare, these lank, sickly gum-trees make me feel quite sentimental.”

CHAPTER III.

EXPLANATORY CONVERSATION.

NEVER had the small principality presented a more fascinating aspect. The sun was sinking behind the glittering domes and spires of the Casino. The tiny peninsula lay sleeping on the sea's bosom; and far to the south that mystic Mediterranean, scarcely touched by an horizon line, blended almost imperceptibly with the sky. Higher, lay a golden lake dotted with soft islets of purple; and, higher still, dark, billowy masses of cloud crested by foamy splashes. On the east, a faint, flame-like glow spread over land and water, shrouding the hills above Mentone in a rosy haze. The

nearer heights of Mont Agel and Mont Bataille rose, seamed and barren, above the olive woods at their base, making a sombre background to gaily ornamented villas and semi-tropical gardens; while just below their summits the white Cornice road wound in zig-zag fashion towards Roquebrune, a sun-illuminated patch which seemed to have slipped down from the rocks above.

“Madame Fano is as much a feature of Monaco as the Tête du Chien or the palace of the Grimaldis,” continued the pretty Australian. “Yonder villa,” pointing to a fanciful minareted building embowered in olives and palms, which from where they sat was visible to the left of the gardens, “belongs to Mrs. Kilsyth; but at the present time it is being drained or redecorated, so that the two ladies are among the angels at our hotel. As they are a source of profit to the landlord, and of entertainment to the inmates, no one

is particularly anxious that the villa should be in a state for occupation."

"Has Mrs. Kilsyth been long a widow?" asked Warrender absently. "But, of course, I remember. Who was she?"

"Oh, if it is a question of genealogy, you must go to Lord Bretland. My acquaintance with Debrett and Burke is still in an elementary stage. Lord Bretland, who was Mrs. Kilsyth?"

"She was—a widow," slowly returned Lord Bretland.

"So we naturally conclude. But widows are not brought into the world ready made. Who was Madame Fano's father?"

"He was, according to tradition, an Eastern scholar. His origin is shrouded in obscurity; but it has been said that he belonged to the tribe of Israel. He wrote a book about the Vedic Mythology, and died before he had had the happiness of beholding the infant face of

Madame Fano, whom, in tribute to his memory, his disconsolate widow named after the Vedic god Varuna, not taking into account the consideration of sex."

"Very clearly stated," said Mrs. Featherstone. "Anyhow, it is a satisfaction to feel that one's mind is being improved. I wasn't acquainted with the gentleman called Varuna. The Vedic gods aren't much known in the bush. Go on, Lord Bretland; Mrs. Kilsyth's biography ought to be worth hearing."

"Yes, I think so, especially if one could hear it from her own lips. Mrs. Kilsyth is so candid, and so communicative about most things, not everything—her antecedents, for instance. I've heard it said that she is of South American origin, and I have been told that her father is in a madhouse. I can give a bald outline of her story, and that is all, Mrs. Featherstone. The interesting widow of the Eastern savant devoted herself to the education of her daughter,

and to the investigation of systems at Homburg and Baden—systems for discovering the secrets of numbers. She wasn't always successful. The air of a Kursaal is unhealthy. Miss Varuna fell ill ; had to be taken to the Engadine, where, alas ! were no gaming-houses. But we are told that for a short time love may be as potent a source of excitement as gambling ; and Passion, Superstition, and Hysteria form three sides of a moral triangle. Reginald Kilsyth was at the Chalet at Pontresina. You, Warrender, at any rate, know something about the Kilsyth history, or ought to do so, since your place adjoins Hallingford."

"It is a fact," replied Warrender, "that I knew almost nothing about the place or its surroundings till I took possession a few months ago. Then my stay was a short one, and Sir John Kilsyth never talked of his brother."

"And pray remember that *I* only came over

from Australia two years ago," interjected Mrs. Featherstone.

Lord Bretland turned towards her. "There are in the family two properties and two religions. Marelands goes with the title. That branch has been Protestant, I might almost say Puritan, since the days of Cromwell. Hallingford Abbey descended for generations in a younger and Roman Catholic branch, till, failing other heirs, estates and religions were joined in the person of old Sir William, the father of the late baronet and of the Reginald we are talking of. He would have been glad enough to do away with distinctions of faith, but, oddly enough, Regie became imbued with the traditions of the place, turned pervert of his own accord, and, when he inherited the Abbey, was as rabid a Roman Catholic as you could find in Rome—or in England, which is saying more. There was even a talk of his joining the priesthood. However, our fascinating friend settled that.

The dear widow became suddenly inspired with an enthusiasm for romance and religion. She sighed for the innocent and domestic joys of life. She sighed for spiritual consolations. For some time the gaming-rooms knew her not. She turned Catholic also, or might have been so before, for all I know, and Kilsyth married her."

Lord Bretland paused under the somewhat embarrassing consciousness that he was speaking energetically, and had allowed himself to become dramatic. His fishy eyes shot a gleam of animation upon his listeners. Both appeared profoundly interested. Mrs. Featherstone gave a little eager nod, and smiled quizzically.

"That must have been a long time ago?"

Lord Bretland shook his head mournfully. "Ye-es. Ah, Mrs. Featherstone, you have entrapped me into a confession of my age. Eighteen years ago I was a young man, and I also was staying at Pontresina."

“Well,” said Mrs. Featherstone decidedly, “I am not at all surprised that your friend did not become a priest. Setting aside her beauty—and I’m pretty sure that must have been considerable, if at five-and-twenty Mrs. Kilsyth was as talkative, as inconsequent, and as amusing as I find her at fifty—she must have been simply irresistible.”

“At all events,” continued Lord Bretland, “Regie Kilsyth never quite fell out of love with his wife, though he very soon became aware of her absolute unreliableness. It was quite pretty to hear him making excuses for her eccentricities. He got into the way of treating her as a spoiled child, and of considering her as little accountable for her actions. On the whole, he resigned himself to the inevitable with a fairly good grace, and was rather amused by her vagaries. Mental equilibrium isn’t the least necessary to make a woman beloved. The more kaleidoscopic she is, the greater her charm.

It's wonderful what a trick of manner will do !”

“ I quite agree with you,” retorted Mrs. Featherstone, “ when one sees the sort of women who make the greatest fools of men.”

“ Well, to return to poor Mrs. Kilsyth ; English life did not suit her excitable temperament. A course of waters at Homburg every year became perfectly necessary for her health. The confessional lost its attraction. Out of sheer perversity she apostatised, and took a plunge into atheism by way of variety.”

“ But I must say,” interrupted the Australian lady, “ that Mrs. Kilsyth is now quite a fervent Catholic. She does not play in Passion Week ; and I never saw any one look a greater picture of misery.”

“ Mrs. Kilsyth has passed through many phases of spiritual experience. Religion is Colonel Cazalette's foible, and it was he who some time later brought her back to the bosom

of the Church. But Kilsyth felt her falling away deeply. Folly, even the milder forms of vice, he could pardon readily, but not disrespect to his creed. This, his will, made about that very time, proved. At his death, which happened about ten years after the marriage, it was found that he had left the whole of his property to Helena on the condition that she was brought up a strict Roman Catholic, and had appointed his brother her guardian. Mrs. Kilsyth's natural rights were barely recognised, and only in the event of Sir John dying *after* Miss Helena had attained the age of eighteen, would she be permitted to live with her mother, while Mrs. Kilsyth's jointure was so tied up in the hands of trustees that the heirs of Monsieur Blanc have happily only reaped the benefit of her yearly income."

"And Madame Fano?" asked Warrender.

"Varuna, who during these years had resided under her stepfather's roof, was naturally not

mentioned in his will. She and Mrs. Kilsyth left England together. Dear old Sir John hated his sister-in-law as much as it was in his nature to hate any woman, and was rejoiced to be quit of her. You can imagine the scene. The little girl, Helena, clinging with tears and entreaties to her mother, who had always a most extraordinary fascination for this child of another breed; Varuna cold and disdainful; Mrs. Kilsyth frantic, tearing her passions to tatters—a tigress robbed of her young. Poor lady! if her emotions are undisciplined and evanescent they are certainly genuine—for a short time at least.”

“Lord Bretland,” interrupted Mrs. Featherstone, “are you a victim to Mrs. Kilsyth’s elderly charms, that you insist upon analysing her virtues and peculiarities so exhaustively? Don’t you see it is the daughter in whom Mr. Warrender feels so deep an interest?”

“Varuna Fano’s story is a tragedy of Monte

Carlo," said Lord Bretland gravely. "Mother and daughter took up their abode here, and fell in with a queer set. At seventeen Varuna was married in Nice to a good-looking, coarse, dissipated *brute*, for whose conduct there was but one excuse—a depraved appetite for opium. He was found one morning dead from an overdose of morphia; and the kindest action which he ever performed towards his wretched wife was when he left her a widow, penniless, and burdened with an idiot child. The suicide was never very clearly proved, but Fano had been losing heavily, and the administration did all they could to hush up the affair."

Lord Bretland ceased speaking. There was a pause. Warrender made no comment upon the strange history that he had heard, but biting the end of his moustache gazed vacantly seaward. Presently, Lord Bretland, all dramatic intonation gone from his voice, listlessly remarked that they were transgressing the canons of the

Riviera in lingering after the sunset chill ; and Mrs. Featherstone rose with a clinking of her bangles and a rustle of her satin skirts.

“Come, Mr. Warrender, you are going to dine with us, and be introduced to my husband. I can’t promise you a place beside the enchantress ; but I’ll invite you to meet her in our salon at 11.30 this evening to drink punch and to see the new year in. Where are you going to stay ?”

“I believe that my luggage has been sent to the Hôtel des Anges,” answered Warrender.

Mrs. Featherstone professed unbounded pleasure at this information, and proceeded to descant upon the excellence of the *cuisine*. As they crossed towards the square a little group approached, consisting of a lady, lean, well dressed, of the bird-like aristocratic style of feature, who seemed the embodied essence of British Philistinism ; a stout, red-faced, cheery-looking German gentleman ; and a sallow,

melancholy-visaged middle-aged man in whose appearance were curiously combined the military air with that of the dilettante, and who gave the impression of making a continual effort to reconcile himself with uncongenial circumstances.

“That is my husband,” whispered the pretty Australian. “Now, how shall I classify him? There’s a certain type of man one meets everywhere,” she continued, as gravely as though she were giving a lecture. “He is a ‘fellow.’ All his male friends are ‘fellows.’ They are not particularly clever, or artistic, or anything else; they’re simply good fellows. Well, that is exactly what my husband is *not*. I don’t mean to say that he is artistic—in the way of pictures and china—or of the æsthetic tribe. Music is his forte. He is trying to compose an opera, and when he is not wrapped up in harmonies, he is really decidedly entertaining. I must say,” she added, with her affected air of simplicity, “that I prefer a man in his maturity. That is,

because I am so young. Do you think that I shall *ever* be old enough to love a boy? The lady walking with him is one of the people at our hotel. How much soap and hot water do you think would be required to take the starch out of her? Mrs. Livingstone, let me introduce Mr. Warrender. Mr. Braunstein, have you given Jules proper instructions about the punch for our orgie this evening? My husband, General Featherstone—Mr. Warrender.”

In the confusion of introductions that took place the party divided, and Warrender found himself walking beside Lord Bretland.

“It does not say much for the natural resources of civilised beings, when one’s brain can be stimulated by the vapid nonsense that is talked in a place like this,” remarked Lord Bretland, who, after his fashion, was something of a philosopher. “Here have I been, for the last two months, studying the world compressed into the space of a few square

yards. Certainly I have the advantage of being able to retire into my villa—where, by the way, you must come and breakfast with me to-morrow—when the spectacle becomes too painful ; but there is no doubt that the sight of all the frivolity, exaggeration, hardened vice, and artificial goads to sated senses, which are displayed at Monte Carlo, is a liberal education. We live our satires now-a-days, instead of writing them. One gets a bird's-eye view of the whole social system here, and the absence of dividing fences brings about a wideness of sympathy that may or may not be beneficial, but is at least enlightening. You know the story of the Duchess of ——, who, when one of the croupiers refused to cash her cheque, imperiously asserted her rank. ‘Madam,’ said he with a bow, ‘all ladies are duchesses here!’”

Warrender made an impatient gesture.

“The place may amuse you,” he said ; “to me it is absolutely sickening. There is no

stronger instance of the bad effect it may have upon people born for nobler things than the story you were telling a little while ago."

"Poor Madame Fano! You must not judge of her entirely by what you hear. It is my opinion that her unhappy marriage has petrified her very soul. That woman possesses, I am convinced, the strongest capacity for devotion—all expended in this vile passion for gambling. They call her the 'Vampire,' but not for the reason you may perhaps suppose. I don't believe that she has ever in her life unbent to any man. She is passionless, inaccessible, and pure as the edelweiss."

"Yet why—why?" began Warrender eagerly, and paused.

"Why do men follow her like a pack of fools, and throw themselves down precipices in despair at her coldness? Because the attentions of a certain great personage first of all made her the fashion. Because her iciness piques curiosity

and excites ardour; and because she has a superstitious fancy that it is impossible for her to win at play unless her money is staked by a man who loves her. Don't you see the connection of ideas? It is like that weird fairy tale in which a magician rules the princess, and, under penalty of death, propounds riddles to her suitors. The lady's pleasure-garden rattles with human skeletons; she herself is disdainful, weary, wretched. She is under a spell, from which but one can release her. So with Varuna. Teach her to love, and the evil enchantment will be broken."

"You are still half a poet, Bretland."

"No—only an observer: but I am poetic enough to cherish the belief that, for a woman, the one potent god of the universe is Love. I have my theories about Varuna. She is not what she seems. That woman is the victim of some secret dread, not of any definite enemy, but of imprisoned forces within her own nature.

Some day they will burst their bonds, and she will be changed. Here we are at my diggings; will you come in and have a sherry and bitters before the *table d'hôte*? You will find it amusing at the Des Anges. I often go there myself, but to-night I have an engagement. We shall meet later at the Casino."

Warrender declined the invitation. Instead of proceeding to the hotel, however, he turned again into the garden, and, seating himself upon a bench facing the sea, gave himself up to reverie. His thoughts wandered back several years to the time of his first meeting with Helena Kilsyth.

CHAPTER IV.

A RETROSPECT.

AT twenty-four George Warrender was appointed private secretary to the governor of one of our most distant and lately formed colonies.

He was a second son, and his prospects in life could not be called brilliant. The appointment had been obtained for him through the influence of his godfather—an eccentric, and, to him, unknown gentleman—to whose notice he had by some lucky chance been suddenly recommended. Mr. Poyntsett was unmarried and wealthy. He expressed a wish to make his godson's acquaintance, and invited George to his place, Branches. Thither Warrender went

a few days before the date fixed for his departure from England.

His host was a valetudinarian of sedentary pursuits, who remained for the greater part of the day shut up in his study. Warrender liked being out of doors and was fond of sport; but in April there was little or nothing of that sort to keep him employed. His time hung rather heavily upon his hands, and he spent most of his days in aimless wandering about the place.

The estate adjoining Branches was called Hallingford Abbey, and belonged to a Roman Catholic family which had been lately enriched by the discovery of coal upon the property. The late owner had not long been dead, and it was held in trust for the heiress, a little girl of ten.

These particulars Warrender learned incidentally during his conversations with the gardener at Branches. The subject had no especial interest for him, except that he had

asked to see the house and permission had been refused. He was, however, an enthusiastic lover of nature; and Hallingford Chase offered him almost equal attractions. It was easy of access and a pleasant resort on those spring days—more so, now, he thought, than when in the full glory of summer foliage.

He delighted in strolling through the grassy rides where the young green mingled with the withered brown, and where the dead leaves of the year before made a crisp sound beneath his feet. The hawthorn was putting forth its tender shoots, and the hazel bushes were thickening with green. The ground was spangled with blue-bells and primroses, and the gentle wood-anemones bent their graceful heads to a tiny stream which trickled beneath overhanging fronds of fern. The sunbeams quivered upon violet-studded beds of moss, where each dry tendril was distinct, and which gave out the delicious scent of woody earth.

It was intense enjoyment to lie idly dreaming with eyes upraised to heaven's blue, or piercing the mazy vista of interlacing boughs and soft verdure. The wind soughed through the budding branches overhead in long monotonous swells, followed by sudden lulls, and then the birds broke in with their chorus of sweet cooings and inarticulate gurglings. There was the pretty note of the yellow-hammer, the trill and full chirrup of the chaffinch, the *too whee, too whee* of the thrush, and yet another sound, not of wind or bird, which seemed to proceed from a leafy hollow screened by a small thicket of hazel and low bracken fern, and which he knew dipped down abruptly behind where he lay. In his present position the interior was quite hidden from his view: but the sound was unmistakable. It was that of a child sobbing.

This was no ordinary paroxysm of infantile grief. The sobs were deep and stifling as

though drawn upward from the very soul. Every now and then they subsided for a few moments, and then there arose a most pitiful cry of "Mamma, mamma. Oh I want mamma."

"Poor little thing!" said Warrender to himself. "Has she lost herself, I wonder? Or is her mother dead? and if so, how can I comfort her?"

He got up and cautiously approached the leafy thicket which fringed the upper edge of the pit. He knew the spot. At his feet was a rocky bank, shelving more gradually to his right and left. On the other side the hollow was open and stretched away in a lovely glade. The floor was carpeted with moss and spring flowers. Two or three Scotch firs clung to the side of the little cliff. The grey stone was overgrown with ivy, and here and there a rough bench had been hewn.

On one of these a little girl was lying. Her head was buried in her arms, but a mass of

fair hair fell over her shoulders. She could not, he thought, be more than ten or eleven, and her limbs were small for her age. Her slender frame was convulsed with anguish, and still at intervals she repeated the cry "Mamma, mamma!" Then for a few minutes she wept silently. Presently she raised herself to a sitting posture, and stretching forth her half bare arms cried in a tone of despair—

"Oh, I can't bear it. I'm so lonely. I want my mamma. Why are they so cruel? Why won't they let me go to my mother?"

After this outburst a sense of contrition seemed to come over her. She folded her hands devoutly, and repeated the simple formula of her faith: "Oh, my God, because Thou art so good I am very sorry that I have sinned against Thee by my impatience and my ingratitude." He could not see her face, but watched and listened, deeply interested in her words and gestures, which were at once so

childlike and so old. She was praying still, but in lower tones. She besought the Blessed Virgin to intercede for her mother and for herself. She invoked her patron saint in the quaint language of the Catholic ritual. Poor child! Nay, happy child! To her the unseen world was a living reality.

Her prayers seemed to soothe and pacify her. With a sorrowful but resigned air she rose and walked away from the shadow of the cliff. Pausing a few paces distant, she turned and looked upward almost in his direction. Thus she became fully visible to him. Never had he beheld so mournful, so wistful a face. The wonder seemed that a child so sensitive, so fragile, could ever have been created and sent forth to buffet with the world.

She was curiously, almost fantastically, dressed in a manner which forbade the supposition that she had been recently made an orphan. She wore a frock of dark crimson velvet,

quaintly cut, and adorned with deep lace at the throat and wrists. Her golden hair lay in little rings upon her forehead after the fashion of an old picture. Her eyes had a deep searching gaze inexpressibly sad, like that of one haunted by an ever recurring memory.

So absorbed was Warrender in his observations that he forgot to take any precautions against startling her. An involuntary movement of his foot sent a stone rolling down the steep incline, and attracting her attention revealed his whereabouts. Her eyes met his, and making a step forward he stood unconcealed, raising his hat with a gesture of apology.

The expression of surprise which crossed her face, and something stately and unconsciously commanding in the air with which she acknowledged his greeting, told him at once that he was in the presence of the little mistress of Hallingford.

He hurriedly descended the slope where it

was more gentle in its incline, and stood bareheaded before her.

“You have been watching me,” said the little girl flushing slightly. “Did you mean to watch me? What are you doing here? People are not allowed to walk in this wood unless they are friends of my uncle.” She paused and eyed him, at first questioningly, then, with doubts as to his condition evidently dispelled, she added, “You are a gentleman, are you not?”

Warrender’s heart throbbed with pity and interest; he could not smile.

“I hope so” he answered. “I don’t know your uncle; but the person I am staying with has permission to walk here.”

“What is his name?” she asked with the manner of a little princess.

“Mr. Poyntsett.”

She shook her head. “I never heard of him; and I have not seen you before; but

I like your face. It reminds me of a picture of John the Baptist at Marelands. Will you stay and talk to me for a little while? You look kind, and as though you could help people to be happier. You wish to do so, don't you?"

The grave directness of the child's gaze, the pathetic quiver of her lips, and the old-fashioned precision of her language, which showed that she had lived much with grown up people, moved Warrender exceedingly. He obeyed her gesture of invitation, and seated himself upon the stone bench she had formerly occupied, while she leaned against the wall of the little amphitheatre, with her eyes never moving from his face. Her earnest look seemed to demand a reply to her question.

"I wish with all my heart that I could help you," he said. "I heard you crying, and that was why I stayed—because I wanted to

do anything I could to make you less miserable. Tell me all about your trouble. I'm only a stranger, but I'm very sorry for you." She stretched forth her hand to him with that childlike confidence which is so rarely deceived. "My little girl," he went on "tell me why you are so unhappy."

"I want my mother," she answered with inexpressible sadness. "She has gone away and they will not let her come back to me."

"Where is she?"

"In Italy, or France, I don't know which. Hôtel des Étrangers, Nice, that is where they live."

"They?" he repeated in a perplexed tone.

"There is my sister too. She is a great deal older than I am, and she is tall and like no one I have ever seen, she is so beautiful. She did not laugh and dance and sing like my mother, she was grave and very fond of reading; and she

was always good to me. I love her very much."

"Who will not let your mother come back to you?" he asked, greatly puzzled.

"I don't know. No one here knows her except uncle John, and he has told me that he can't do anything, and does not want to talk of her. It was because of something my father wrote before he died—I can't tell what it means. This used to be her home; and now they say that she has no right here, and that God is angry with her because she will not pray or go to church."

"She is not a Catholic then?"

"She was so once; oh I remember so well her taking me into the chapel and making me kneel before the altar, and I thought that she was like Our Lady, only more beautiful, if that could be. But Father Clifford says that she has been led astray by evil counsel, and that I can only pray for her forgiveness, and be patient till it

is granted. How shall I know? Do you think that she will ever be allowed to come back here?"

"It is impossible for me to say," answered Warrender. "Perhaps when you are older you will go to her."

The child shook her head. "No, I am always to stay here, except when I am with uncle John at Marelands. This place will belong to me when I am twenty-one, then I can do as I please. I shall have great power. The Church will require much of me. This is what Father Clifford says. If I marry and have children, they must be Catholics; and I must only marry a Catholic."

Warrender smiled this time at the child's naïve statement. "You are—" he began, and paused, not clearly remembering the name of the little heiress.

"I am Helena Kilsyth."

"And have you no one at home?" said

Warrender—"no one to love you and take care of you? Are you allowed to wander alone in the wood?"

"There are a great many people to take care of me," said the child; "but no one to love me—not as there used to be. They think I don't see the difference because I say nothing; but one knows when one is loved. It is like something in the air; you *feel* it. Love is not flattery or being allowed to do as you please. Fraülein is very good; but she is always a little glad when Father Clifford takes me out, or when she has a cold, as to-day, and can sit by the fire and drink mulled beer, and do no lessons. And when I ask her to let me come into the wood, she says yes, because I fidget her indoors, and the air is good for me; and if I promise not to go beyond call of Sophie I may sit here by myself. So Sophie stays over there in the avenue, she says I am quite safe as long as I only come nere; and people are not

allowed to walk in the wood without asking leave."

"Dear little Helena," said George, "I am glad I came here to-day, if it is only because I saw you in trouble. I think talking to me has done you good already. Do you often cry in that way, or were you specially unhappy?"

"I was so disappointed," murmured the child. "It must be because I am not good enough," she added dejectedly; "not because prayer is of no use. I did pray so—with my whole heart."

"For what, my child?"

"You know the stories of the saints?" He did not dare answer in the negative lest her confidence should be checked; and she continued, "They came more often to children than to grown up people, and it was generally in woods and quiet places. All last night I lay awake thinking of St. Lucy, and of how her prayers for her mother had been answered;

and oh!" she cried fervently, clasping her hands, "what is the body compared with the soul?"

"So you came here to-day hoping that one of the saints would appear to you and assure you that your prayers had been heard?"

"It would be so beautiful to think that my guardian angel watched over my mother too, and brought us near to each other. I should find it easier then to have patience till I am grown up; and I should not be afraid, as I often am, that before ten years are over my mother will have forgotten me."

"Oh, impossible!" cried Warrender. "Why should you fear that? You are allowed to write to each other?"

"My mother does not often answer my letters. It is because she loves me so much that she does not wish to be reminded of me; thinking of me makes her miserable—it makes her ill. I ought not to want that she should

be unhappy, so when I write I say very little of what is in my heart. Perhaps she thinks, like the rest, that because I am a little girl I forget easily. Oh if some one—who knew—could tell me if it were right for us not to think of each other! That could not be. It would be better if she were dead, for then I could pray for her.”

The child's sobs broke forth again. She struggled against them, but ineffectually. Touched to the quick, and longing to give her comfort, Warrender fondled and soothed her. After a time she became calm, and looked up at him with innocent affection. A child's trust is so readily given. There are no conventional barriers to be overleaped ere the inner sanctuary can be gained.

“My little Helena,” said Warrender, “I don't know your mother or the reasons for your separation from each other; but I can tell you what I think and feel, and what I

am sure is best for you. Our prayers are not always answered as we expect. We pray for something as if our life depended upon it, and we are bitterly grieved because what we long for seems withheld:—but it may be coming to us all the while in quite another form to the one we hoped for.”

A light broke over the child's face. “I understand,” she said; “I wanted to see St. Lucy, and instead, there came you.”

“No, I did not mean that. I'm afraid I can't be of much use to you. I am going away to-morrow.”

“Away!” she repeated blankly. “Where?”

“To a place so far off that I don't think you would know its name. I am going away from my friends and relations, and shall be almost as lonely as you are. Don't you see, Helena, it's a sort of law in this life that we can't be with those we care for. If we had only our bodies and there were nothing beyond seeing

and hearing, that would be terrible, but there's something within us which can bridge over seas, which can almost compel the one we are thinking of to think of us in return. That is love. And when it has been once felt it can never die, it's just as real as we ourselves—more real, for it will last after death. If a common love is like that, what do you think a mother's love must be?—a mother's love that is just a part of nature—a law in itself. So, Helena, you must never stifle your beautiful fancies about your mother. They are drawing her to you all the time; and you don't know the good you may be doing her. Let her be your guardian saint. Love her always, think of her, pray for her. Don't ever fear that she will forget you, for that is simply impossible. And remember that what I say is true. Sympathy makes distance and separation seem as nothing. You will not be lonely when you are thinking of her

and looking forward to the day which shall bring you together. Ten years is not such a long time ; it will soon pass away. I know parents in India who were obliged to send their children from them, and did not see them again till they were grown up. They did not forget."

He paused. Helena had drawn closer to him, and was now bending forward, looking up at him, all her soul in her gaze. "Oh tell me more, tell me more!" she cried.

"Pain and separation and silence are often no one's fault," continued George "only part of the crookedness of life. The world seems sometimes like an ill-fitting piece of mosaic—none of the pieces join, none of the colours harmonise—or very seldom. We puzzle and fret and can't make out the plan of it, or if there is any plan at all. We are all like children in that ; it is hard for us to accept the sadness and mystery of life as a thing that must

be ; and we long blindly for what would not be good for us if it were given. So, my poor little girl, you must not pray that miracles may be done for you. Don't expect that saints will come down from Heaven and talk to you. God works in a better way. He sends comfort through the living ; and when He makes you turn for sympathy to the people around you, He is educating you and them, for He is drawing forth love from their heart and yours."

The child's eyes seemed to become larger and more spiritual ; her lips were parted as if she were drinking in every word that he uttered. Warrender had been carried away by his own simple eloquence. At that moment a shrill call sounded in the distance, "Mees Hélène, Mees Hélène ; it is time to go in." The child started and rose to her feet. Warrender rose too.

"That is Sophie," said Helena. "I promised to go back as soon as she called me. Good-bye,

kind, kind man. I shall think of everything you have said. I shall think of the bridge of love, and I shall send my heart across it every day, every night, to meet my mother's heart. Oh, you have helped me ! You have been good ! I will remember you too—always. Tell me your name."

Warrender wrote his name upon a leaf in his pocket-book and gave it to her. She spelled out the syllables with childlike pains.

"George War-ren-der. Good-bye, George Warrender. I wish you weren't going away. I wish you lived near here. I hope that you will not be very long. I will never forget you."

Warrender lifted the little hand and kissed it with chivalrous tenderness.

"Nor I you. But I should like very much to know if, as time goes on, you become happier. I am quite sure that you will do so ; but I shall be wondering ; and it would give me pleasure if some day you would write me a

little letter, and tell me that you are happier—only that. Will you?”

“Yes,” replied Helena, “willingly. But tell me where to write.”

He wrote an address legibly upon the slip of paper he had given her.

“There! That is not where I am going; but a letter will always be sent to me. And by and by I shall come back again.”

A gleam of joy irradiated the child's sorrowful face. “Then perhaps I shall be grown up, and able to do as I please at Hallingford. And you will come and see me? Promise me that you will come and see me.”

“Indeed, I will promise that gladly,” answered Warrender; and then, with a long, earnest look, the child turned and left him.

CHAPTER V.

STILL RETROSPECTIVE.

A GOOD many months later Warrender received a letter directed in unformed handwriting, and forwarded from the address he had given Helena.

“MY DEAR GEORGE WARRENDER,

“I write to you because I promised and because I am *really* happier now. I did not write before because we went to Marelands. Fraülein went away, and another lady came who loves me better, and I have to do a great many lessons. But there is no wood here and no chapel—no real chapel. And there was nothing to make me *much* happier except thinking of what

you said. John the Baptist *is* like you. Uncle John was very kind, and had that picture put into the little room at the top of the house, which they have made into an oratory for Father Clifford. It makes me remember your face. My mother did not write to me for a long while. My sister Varuna was married; and now her husband is dead, and she has a little baby who is sick, so my mother was very unhappy. Do you remember what you said—that God sends comfort by the living? There was a kind good gentleman where she lives. I think he must be like you. Father Clifford says that it is through him my prayers have been answered, for now, my mother has come back to the Church. It is he who showed her the way. I am very happy. I never feel lonely when I can think of my mother. At night I dream of her; and in the daytime I fancy that I can see her face—so beautiful and good and loving. Perhaps some day you will know her.

“I have nothing more to tell you, except that I will never forget you; and I hope that you will come back soon and that you will remember your promise. Are you a Catholic like me? I want so to know. And are you rich? I don't think you can be or you would not have gone away. If you are not rich I should like to give you some of my money, half of it if you please, for you helped me very much, and I remain,

“Your affectionate friend,

“HELENA KILSYTH.”

* * * * *

Mr. Poyntsett was dead and had left Branches to George Warrender.

The young man was in Mexico when this news reached him. He was in no haste to return to Europe. His work was not done. Research into the history of a bygone civilisation absorbed his energies. He waited till he

had accomplished all the explorations possible with his limited resources, and then set sail for England, not with any strong feeling of elation, but with a mild pleasure at the prospect of seeing his own people again, and distinct satisfaction in the thought that the means were assured him for prosecuting his favourite branch of discovery. He went home first and stayed some weeks with his relations, and it was more than a year before he took possession of his new kingdom.

As he walked about the Branches estate, renewing his acquaintance with servants who only vaguely remembered him, and recognising landmarks which it could hardly be said were familiar to him, the one incident, during his short visit to the place years before, which had seized upon his imagination, and had lain deep in his memory ever since, now started into new vividness.

He asked his old friend, the gardener, if

Hallingford Abbey were inhabited, and if Miss Kilsyth still lived with her uncle.

The old man nodded his head. "She be bound to live with Sir John till she comes of age. Miss Helena is a fine young lady, sir, and will have a mort of money. It's a pity she is so set upon her religion. But she is kind to every one, Protestants and Papists alike, and the poor are ready to jump for joy when they hear the family is coming to Hallingford. That's only once a year about, for the shooting; for Sir John, he likes the hunting and Marelands as is natural, being his own place. They are all at the Abbey now, sir; and I'm told there's company in the house."

Warrender strolled on towards the wood. He thought of the promise he had made the little girl, and wondered if she had forgotten it, or if she connected the new owner of Branches with her one day's friend. He remembered the scene in the Chase as

though it had taken place but yesterday ; the little girl's anguish of grief, her innocent response to his appeal ; her simple superstition—if indeed it were superstition. Did she still wander alone in woods, he thought, hoping that a St. Lucy or a St. Helena would be sent from Heaven in answer to her prayers to set straight this tangled skein of life. He smiled to himself, as, his vague intention becoming a purpose, he stepped forth briskly to the Chase. All the way his fancy played about her image, and by the time he reached the dell he had conjured up a very distinct vision of the grave, pure-eyed child whose little hand he had kissed so chivalrously at parting.

“I wonder if she would think me like John the Baptist now !” he said to himself. It was summer time, and the ground was no longer gaily spangled, nor was there in the air that wonderful sense of exhilaration which is so often felt while walking in a wood

during spring. The grassy aisles were closed in by dense foliage, the bracken fern grew high. The leaves scarcely whispered to each other, so still was the atmosphere. In the shade there were mysterious depths of greenery. Everything seemed very still. Occasionally a startled hare would cross the path, or a young pheasant would flutter among the undergrowth. Now and then might be heard the bell-like note of the cuckoo or the cooing of wood-pigeons ; but the birds had found their mates, and the concert of trilling songsters was over.

According to the laws of romance, Helena, the woman, should have been waiting by the old grey stone embankment where Helena the child had bidden Warrender farewell. Was it possible that he had expected to see her, and if not, why did he feel a pang of disappointment? No Helena was there. Everything else was just as memory had pictured it, the ivy-grown rocks, the rudely-hewn bench, the mossy

carpet, the Scotch firs ; the very thicket of hazel, from the shelter of which he had been a compassionate witness of the little heiress's grief.

He lingered a short while on the spot, again speculating whether or not she had forgotten him, and half inclined to at once put her assurances to the test. But the dread of encountering a large party deterred him. He walked aimlessly down the glade, and at last found himself on a cleared rise overlooking the Abbey. It was a stately pile. The front had evidently been rebuilt and modernised and showed an extensive tract of lawn and pleasure-garden, which again merged in a finely timbered park, bordered on one side by the wood he had quitted. The most interesting part of the building lay in the rear, where remained the original cloisters, quadrangle, and chapel. The monks' refectory had been turned into offices and the fishponds had been filled up. A long narrow avenue of yews stretched at right angles

from the house, and formed a sombre but picturesque background to an old-fashioned garden, which in its turn was divided by a low yew hedge from the gayer and more elaborate parterre.

Warrender struck across the park, and presently gained the yew tree avenue, scarcely considering that this was not the proper approach to the Abbey, or if he did so, reassuring himself by the reflection that it would be easy to ask a gardener for directions. A small iron gate admitted him into the walk ; but so dense was the shadow cast by these ancient trees, so gloomy, silent and mysterious did the place appear in contrast to the moving lights and gay verdure without, that he felt as though he had stepped out of the world of to-day into a region consecrated to an austere past.

Here and there, were some remains of old masonry, a monastic looking gateway, and a crumbling wall which closed in one side of

the walk. Towards the centre there was a break in the straight line of avenue ; the yew-trees grew more irregularly, and here stood a little covered platform, where was erected a shrine with a marble image of the Virgin crowned by fresh flowers, and apparently tended by some loving hand. Warrender did not at first perceive the pavilion, which was screened by the branches of a yew-tree, projecting beyond its companions. As he approached it, he was surprised to find himself confronted by a young lady.

She was standing upon the moss-grown steps leading to the platform, and advanced with a smile rather of politeness than of welcome, evidently imagining the footsteps to be those of a guest in the house ; but when the first glance told her that this was a stranger she seemed surprised, halted, and looked again.

Warrender took off his hat and she bowed

slightly ; then as they looked at each other a curious light broke over her features. He had no difficulty in recognising her. Her face having been old for her years, had altered very little. There was the same air of gentle stateliness, the same candid brow and clear sad gaze, the same expression of mingled innocence and wistfulness, which had charmed him in the child.

“Do you remember me ?” he asked simply. “I am George Warrender.”

She held out her hand to him with frank pleasure. “Oh, I am glad to see you again. I have never forgotten that day in the wood, when you were so kind to me. I should have known you, if only by your voice. So you have kept your promise ?”

“I hardly hoped that you would recollect that, and welcome me ; but I was determined to see for myself.”

“I remember a great many things about

you," answered Helena, blushing slightly; "my letter among them. I must have been a very stupid little girl, Mr. Warrender—and how you must have smiled at my foolishness! I wanted to share my fortune with you, didn't I?" She laughed softly. "And now you are the owner of Branches, and have come to live near us. How strange it is! We only heard of your arrival yesterday, Uncle John is so anxious to know you; he rode over to call upon you this morning. When you go back, or rather, when you meet him here—for you will stay to luncheon, won't you!—you will find that he has left an invitation for you to dine here this evening."

"It is very good of you, Miss Kilsyth, to make me feel myself at home so quickly. You know I am a stranger here in every sense. I hardly knew Mr. Poyntsett, though he was my god father, and was never at Branches in my life, except during that one visit when I

was so ill mannerly as to trespass upon your property."

"And you have been away ever since," said Helena. "I hear that you have been in Mexico, finding out those wonderful buried cities; you must tell me about them some time. But I think it much more strange that you should recollect me, than I you. Besides, I had your picture to remind me," and she smiled. "You are not so much like John the Baptist now, except perhaps in this, that you look as though you were very much in earnest. There are some things in one's childhood," she went on, "which stand out much more vividly than others, though at the time they don't seem important. I suppose that in a kind of way, they are crises in our inner lives. What happened afterwards made me think much more of all that you said that day."

"It is easy to read backwards by later

lights," said Warrender. "But we only know ourselves how it is, that some trivial occurrences affect us deeply, and seem to set in operation forces within ourselves which change the current of life."

He longed to ask her to what event she alluded, and if she had seen her mother during these years, but did not venture to do so. She saw and interpreted his hesitation.

"You are wondering why I should have taken your words so to heart. Did not my letter tell you? Don't you remember saying that the love between mother and child could never fail because it was a reality—a law of nature? You were right. It only needed time to prove that truth. My mother and I have never met since, nevertheless we seem to grow nearer and nearer as years go on. She is now a fervent Catholic. Think what a bond that is between us, and how I can lean upon her in thought, and model my life upon

what I believe hers to be. She writes to me very often, never long letters but always loving ones. She encourages me to tell her everything that is in my mind; to be with her and my sister is the dream of my life. It will be fulfilled some day."

"You have still two or three years to wait?"

"Yes, while they pass I remain of course with my uncle, then I shall come to dear old Hallingford and my mother and sister will live with me. We shall be so happy all together. Uncle John and my mother are prejudiced against each other. There was trouble about my father's will which made breaches between them. But when I am twenty-one all that will be over, and he will have faithfully fulfilled his trust, they will then know and appreciate each other. But," she added in a different tone, "I am troubling you about my affairs, which after

all cannot interest you much. Though I seem to know you so well, Mr. Warrender, we are scarcely more than strangers to each other, and I ought to remember that I am not a child now."

"Oh, do not shut me out from sympathy with you," exclaimed Warrender impulsively. "It has often done me good to think of your childish confidence in me. That kind of thing is like an appeal to one's honour. It made me wish to be good. I have wondered about you so many times. If you knew how glad I am to see you now looking well—and happy!"

A shade passed over the young girl's face. "Oh yes, I am happy. But I don't think it is my nature to be exuberantly joyful. That, you may perhaps imagine, Mr. Warrender, when I tell you that this yew walk is the place I am most fond of in the Abbey grounds. Isn't it a curious spot? so quiet and so mournful. I sit here sometimes on

moonlight nights, when—as is rarely the case—we are at Hallingford in the summer time. You can't think how beautiful it is then, such vivid contrasts of deep shadow and silvery light. Did you come upon it by chance ? ”

“ A fortunate chance,” said Warrender, “ since I have seen you. I had a half-formed intention of calling at the Abbey, but I heard that you had your house full, and was a little shy at the thought of facing a number of strangers. It would have been embarrassing had you not recognised me.”

“ There was no danger of that, as you have seen. Shall we go in-doors now ? I dare say that you won't find the strangers so very formidable. They are nearly all going away the day after to-morrow, when the Militia ball is over. Lord Bretland—one of them—knows you, or at least has been staying with your people. It was he who told me about your

exploits, and your wanderings. What a number of places you have been to, Mr. Warrender. The Fiji Islands. That was where you went first, wasn't it? Australia! Mexico!—Do you know Monaco?" she asked suddenly.

"The naughty little principality? No."

"Why do you say that? Don't you know the story of how the spirit of St. Devote in the form of a dove, guided the boat which held the body of the martyred saint to its resting-place there?"

She looked at that instant so like the child Helena, that he smiled involuntarily.

"One does not think of that legend," he answered. "The name is associated with the gaming rooms, and the tales told of suicide and ruin."

"It is not a legend," she exclaimed eagerly—then added, "you are not a Catholic?"

"No," he replied.

She looked at him earnestly for a moment, disappointment, faint inquiry depicted upon her

expressive features. "We don't live in the world," she said thoughtfully, "and I suppose that I have never realised what harm comes of gambling. It is like the existence of public houses, which one is obliged to accept. And yet what sorrow they cause ! But there must be a great many people who go to Monaco not for the sake of play, just as the priest's mission is to the wicked and unfortunate. My mother and sister are living at Monte Carlo."

Warrender made some commonplace remark upon the beauty of the climate ; and Miss Kilsyth remained silent for some moments. Her frank communicativeness seemed checked. It was as though some impalpable barrier had risen between them. They talked only of ordinary subjects till they had left the yew-tree walk and were again in the world of sunshine and realities. He fancied as they neared the house that her manner unconsciously became graver and more conventional. This impression was

deepened a few moments later when he saw her among her guests. She was sweet and cordial, but a little shy, very quiet, and joining uncertainly in the conversation, as though her interests and pursuits were not those of her companions, and she feared to obtrude them disagreeably. But her exceeding grace and gentle dignity made her one of the most charming of hostesses.

A good many people were lounging in the hall when they entered, and Sir John Kilsyth, ruddy-faced, keen-eyed, dry in speech, the English sportsman written on every line of his somewhat vulpine features and compactly-built figure, had just returned from his morning ride.

He greeted Warrender with bluff cordiality, and pressed upon him the hospitality of the Abbey, though he seemed surprised to find him already acquainted with Helena. Then followed a rather halting explanation and abridged account of the meeting with her eight years before.

This little incident told volumes concerning the relations between uncle and niece, friendly, even affectionate, as was their bearing to each other.

A suave, extremely gentlemanly Catholic priest took his place at luncheon upon Miss Kilsyth's left. His manners were prepossessing, he had travelled much, was apparently above prejudices, and did not disdain a good story. Warrender felt half sad, half amused, to observe the tact with which Father Clifford accommodated himself to the style of conversation Sir John preferred, and the evident antagonism existing between the two. He conceived an Englishman's dislike towards the priest, though obliged to admit that it was hardly justified.

Sir John had much advice to give concerning the management of Branches, and the gentlemen lingered late over the luncheon table. Warrender was surprised to find that the priest had views upon subsoil and the rotation of crops, and had a fund of information generally upon

the pursuits of county gentlemen. The afternoon was spent in pleasant lounging about the garden—lawn tennis and a tour of inspection with Helena of the older part of the building. He returned to Branches only in time to put on his evening clothes and drive back again. It had been arranged that he should dine and sleep at the Abbey upon that evening and the following, when he was to accompany the Kilsyth party to the militia ball.

CHAPTER VI.

LOVE *VERSUS* CREED.

AN intimacy so begun deepens quickly. Warrender waltzed thrice with Helena, and before the third waltz was over knew that he was most reverently in love with her. The feeling seemed to be a part of himself, and to have taken root in his being years before, though he had only now discovered its existence. It was calm, elevating, reasonable, the healthy love which a man may feel deep down in his heart for a true pure-eyed woman, and which, from its very nature, can never die or wholly lose its influence upon his better self.

He did not dance much that evening, but stood apart taking a strange delight in watching

her. All the time he was thinking that she did not quite belong to the circle in which she moved. She smiled and danced, and was gracious in her reserved way to the men, who on account of her beauty, and perhaps her wealth, laid themselves out to please her. But there was in her every look and gesture a sweet, serious dignity that rebuked frivolous gallantry. He observed when she was talking to her partners that she never shed upon them that rare, tender smile which on her recognition of him the day before had illuminated her face, and which he learned later was only called into play when her deepest feelings—those connected with her religion or with her mother—were touched. Occasionally their eyes met, as it were across a gulf, and the glance seemed to imply a peculiar sympathy. This thought was grateful to him ; but he knew that the look was directed with a child's unconsciousness. No thought of the possibility of any nearer bond had

crossed Helena's mind, nor, he knew, would occur to her till he made some definite advance.

He sat beside her during the long drive home, and though she hardly spoke, there came over him a wonderful feeling of peace and happiness in the mere contact of her soft white drapery, and in breathing the perfume of the flowers which she carried.

Upon the morrow most of Sir John's visitors departed, and the old gentleman insisted that Warrender should take up his abode at the Abbey for a week. Thus he was admitted into the holy seclusion of Helena's home life. He sat with her in her own little sanctum, abundantly adorned with photographs of her mother and sister. He rode with her; he walked with her; he spent long hours with her in the wood where they had first met. They were like brother and sister in their intercourse, except for that indefinable something in George's manner which was not fraternal, and which was per-

ceived by Father Clifford if not by Helena. The priest did not approve of the intimacy, but he could not openly thwart Sir John, who encouraged Warrender's addresses, and for the present the surest safeguard lay in Helena's unconsciousness.

The week lengthened into a fortnight before Warrender returned to Branches; but even then, a great part of his days were spent in Helena's society. Books, missions of mercy, the little concerns of every day, afforded so many pretexts for being together, till meetings had become a necessity. So two months had passed away. September came, and with it the week fixed for the Kilsyth's return to Marelands.

Warrender was ill-versed in the signs of dawning affection; but it seemed to him that of late Helena had shown consciousness of his love, and that her manner encouraged him to hope. She was perhaps a little less frank in

her speech than she had been at first ; but then they conversed now upon more purely personal topics ; mere friendly intimacy merges so imperceptibly into something much closer and deeper, and perhaps there was no surer sign of mutual attachment than the long silence which often fell between them, and the glances which surprised each other and quickly drooped. He perceived, sometimes, that her voice had a note of lingering tenderness when she bade him farewell, and wondered, inwardly rebuking his presumption, whether she too counted the hours of their separation. He thought that he observed an occasional look of trouble upon her face, and speculated as to its cause and whether it were in any way connected with the foreign letters for which she watched so eagerly. Every movement of hers, every passing expression upon her features, had now become to him a source of the deepest interest. He was well aware that

the difference in religion was a barrier which possibly might never be surmounted, but Warrender had a way of looking straight beyond present obstacles, to the goal he sought, and had so great faith in the power of love, that he believed it must sooner or later sweep all before it.

Once let him be certain that she cared for him—and if that were so, Helena was too true a woman to deny the fact—it would, he thought, be easy for him to convince her of his reverence for her faith, and his determination that she should never be trammelled in its exercise.

He hardly took into consideration the fact that her fortune was larger than his own; he was sufficiently wealthy to be above the imputation of interested motives. All true, manly love is humble, and yet in its very humility there is a curious pride.

It was the day before that of Helena's

departure. Warrender rode over from Branches in the morning bringing a book for which she had asked him the day before. She had been chill and distant in her manner to him the previous evening, a sudden change from her former sweetness, which, while she had been softly playing some old-fashioned melodies in the hall after tea, had encouraged him to utter some ardent words. She had left him hurriedly. Was she angry? When they met again at dinner he felt almost certain that she had been crying. She looked sad, but not angry, and had sat very silent all the evening, negating the proposal that coffee should be taken out on the terrace, an opportunity for unburthening his heart upon which he had counted. He had spent a miserable night, full of vague fears and tremors. Had he then mistaken her? and did she feel for him nothing more than a sisterly affection? He resolved that on the morrow he would put an end

to doubt. It was his habit to come thus, on no errand in particular, and equally the custom that he should be invited to stay for luncheon, or perhaps the whole day. Upon these occasions he was shown into the library, where Helena usually spent her mornings, but to-day the servant said she was walking on the terrace, and thither he went, hoping that he might find her alone. Father Clifford, however, was with her, and Warrender saw, when still at the distance of some paces, that he had interrupted a serious conversation. The priest was speaking impressively, his gestures were animated, his gaze fixed and earnest, while Helena listened with face downcast and sorrowful. She started and coloured when, at the sound of footsteps, she looked up and saw Warrender approaching, and could only offer her hand in silent greeting. Father Clifford smiled with his usual benignity and adroitly led the conversation by asking some questions

about a local matter in which Warrender had taken active part, and the discussion of which called attention from Helena. "I suppose, Mr. Warrender," he said suavely, "that when we return to Hallingford in the winter, we shall find you in the full swing of your county duties, sitting on the bench, riding to hounds, and all that sort of thing—emulating Sir John, in fact? It will be a change—perhaps not quite an agreeable one at first—from the roving life you have led of late years."

"It is not quite certain that I shall be at Branches in the winter," replied Warrender, pointedly turning to Helena.

She looked up hurriedly and inquiringly. "Are you going—back to Mexico?" she asked, with a little falter in her voice.

"I don't know. Perhaps. What would you advise?" he answered recklessly.

Their eyes met. In hers there was an

expression of mingled pain and dread, while his betrayed deeper feeling than he had intended to show. Her glance fell beneath his look, but she made no effort to reply. Father Clifford broke the rather awkward silence by observing—

“We at the Abbey are hardly impartial judges, Mr. Warrender. It is a matter of moment to us whether Branches is or is not inhabited. We are very dependent upon such a neighbour as yourself, and Miss Kilsyth will feel your loss all the more because she has not lived here long enough at a time to make many intimate friends. On the other hand, I quite see what attractions the buried cities in Mexico must have for you. Your work is an important one, though I don't know that it is sufficiently so to exclude every other aim in life. By the way, did you see a paragraph in this week's *Athenæum* referring to your present discoveries?”

Warrender answered at random. The priest's placid obtuseness, which might be supposed to

mask a deeper motive, irritated his already jarred nerves. He longed to hear Helena speak—longed to be alone with her—to question her upon the change in her demeanour, which he saw so plainly. He burned with anxiety and impatience. It seemed marvellous that he had restrained himself for so long. He must speak—must know the best or worst. For weeks they had been sailing on smooth seas, and she at least had been unconscious of any impending crisis. Now a storm had arisen, the crisis was come, and possibly her mind had for the first time awakened to a sense of her position. Perhaps the priest had been warning her of danger; urging her to dismiss his suit; and already a struggle was raging in her bosom. His pulses thrilled at the thought. In this case he had little to fear. If she loved him—ah, if only she loved him! how soon he would beat down her scruples and gather her into his arms. Let the die be cast at once. If she did not love

him, then better that he should go away and try to forget her, or at least bury the hope of making her his own with the many sweet impossibilities of life.

These thoughts passed through his mind as they paced the terrace. It was a glorious day; the blue unflecked; no suggestion of coming autumn in the air; the roses in their second bloom, and the flower beds a blaze of colour. Helena stopped to cut some of the late Marshal Niel roses. Warrender noticed that before she did so she placed a letter in her reticule. She sighed as she did so. "I hope that you have good news of your mother," said Warrender abruptly.

Again the expression of pain deepened in Helena's eyes. "My mother is very well," she answered in a low voice. "I heard from her this morning." Then she added, trying to resume her usual manner, "Mr. Warrender, I hope you haven't forgotten that we are going

away to-morrow. Have you given McDermott proper instructions as to the cuttings you want planted out? Shall we go round to the garden and pay him a last visit? The houses are worth looking at now. I am always sorry," she continued without a break, "when the time comes for saying good-bye to Hallingford, especially so this year. It is harder to leave a place one is fond of in the summer than in the winter."

Warrender assented eagerly. Father Clifford glanced at Helena as if to learn her pleasure, To George's disappointment she said nervously, "You will come, will you not?"

He turned and walked by her side; but after the tour of inspection, during which they all three chatted with forced unconcern, he lingered behind, watching the gardener, while the latter filled a basket with grapes and peaches. Helena, followed by Warrender, moved on to a bed of carnations, where she added a bunch

of the variegated fragrant blossoms to a nosegay of hot-house flowers which she had already gathered.

“We are going for a long drive this afternoon,” she said in an explanatory tone—“to the convent at Assheton ; and the sisters are so fond of flowers.”

“Miss Kilsyth,” said Warrender, looking at her with a meaning which she could not mistake. “I have something to say to you—a question to ask you upon which much depends for me. May I not speak to you alone ?”

Helena turned very pale and bent closer over her carnations, but did not speak for a moment or two. “I don’t know,” she said hesitatingly. “I—I am very much engaged to day—and—to-morrow—”

“Helena,” he exclaimed passionately, “it is not like you, who are so noble, so tender-hearted, to play with a man’s happiness !”

Her eyes met his now straightly — full of indignant appeal.

“Oh, forgive me,” he murmured. “But you are unlike yourself this morning, and I am in great suspense.”

“You know,” she began agitatedly, “I would not hurt a living creature if I could help it, and how much more—” She checked herself, then added hurriedly, “I would rather bear any suffering myself. If you will wait till to-morrow.” She went on more quietly. “We don’t go away till the afternoon; and, in the morning, if you wish it——”

“I wish only what you wish. But not to-day? Ah, Helena, does that mean that I must not hope?”

She shook her head. Her lips parted as though she would have spoken impulsively. When something seemed to arrest the rising words. He saw that she was deeply moved; the tears gathered in her eyes. Had they been

alone ; had he dared to take her in his arms and force from her the confession of her love, the wall between them might have been broken down for ever. But Father Clifford, by whom the little scene had not been unnoticed, was advancing towards them. Warrender's eyes piteously pleaded. Helena's hands were trembling. The bunch of carnations fell to the ground ; as Warrender restored them, he separated one, a pure white blossom, and placed it last in the basket. "Will you let me keep this ?" he said very humbly. "Won't you give it to me—as a sign that you are not angry with me."

She gave it to him silently, then turned away and joined the priest.

"My daughter," he whispered tenderly, "remember your mother's counsel, remember the example of noble women, who have looked upon the joys of youth and love only as a gift which they might offer to God. Be brave, your reward will be great."

“To-morrow, Father,” murmured Helena with a stifled sob, “I will try to show myself worthy.”

When they reached the terrace again Warrender took his leave.

“I am sorry,” said Father Clifford politely, “that Sir John is not at home. He does not return till late this evening.”

Warrender held Helena’s hand within his own for a moment. He marvelled afterwards at its exceeding coldness. “Good-bye,” he said, “till to-morrow.”

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE YEW TREE WALK.

HELENA went for her drive. She took her flowers and fruit to the nuns; she visited some sick people in the hospital; she played with the orphans whom the sisters tended, and distributed among them books and toys. But her head felt strange and light: she seemed to be treading upon air, and moving and speaking in a dream. All the time she was not for one second free from the haunting sense of Warrender's presence; wherever she looked she saw his beseeching eyes.

Helena shuddered at the thought of the pain she was causing as though it were a wound inflicted upon herself. Her only strength lay

in a kind of spiritual exaltation which possessed her. God required of her a sacrifice, and it should be rendered, not grudgingly and repiningly, but with the unswerving faith of the martyrs of old.

It is in the hour of supreme trial that the influences of childhood and early training press thickly, shaping end and action. So now the discipline of Helena's young life bore fruit—the repression of her natural yearnings and their direction into the channel of religion, the sentiment of almost superstitious reverence for an unseen monitor into which her love for her mother had been changed, her enthusiasm for high motive and disinterested endeavour, all combined and prompted but one decision.

Yet, though this was firmly fixed, though she would not admit the possibility of union with Warrender, there lingered in her breast a faint hope that the sacrifice might not be exacted to the uttermost. The horizon of the future

appears so vast to the young. It is so impossible for a woman entirely to cut herself adrift in thought from the man she loves. As well attempt to annihilate a part of her own nature; and the fancy would not be banished that, perhaps years hence, Warrender might become a Catholic, not for love of her, but from deep conviction, and that then they might be happy.

But the very suggestion brought self-accusation. There must be no paltering with present duty. The renunciation must be complete; no looking backwards or forwards; no bargaining with Fate for future reward.

She was very silent during the drive home. All the way Father Clifford indirectly exhorted, appealed. Without laying special stress upon her own case, his conversation tended to but one object. He painted the glory of self-abnegation; the grandeur of that quiet heroism which renounces earthly joy for the righteousness' sake.

He played upon the young girl's nature, striking only those chords which would produce the harmony he wished. Her mind was a responsive instrument to this master hand. Father Clifford was no cold-blooded director shorn of human sympathies. Had he been only the mouthpiece of his Church his influence over Helena might perhaps have fallen short of its mark. He, too, had fought, bled, and triumphed. His voice trilled with feeling, but it also inspired passionless resolve. He was an enthusiast for his faith, and his words stirred her to such a pitch of spiritual fervour that there seemed but one compelling duty. Her mother's letter, which had arrived that morning, strengthened her fanaticism, and was perhaps the most powerful weapon that could have been raised against Warrender.

Mrs. Kilsyth, alarmed by Helena's frequent mention of her new friend, suspecting that Sir John encouraged the intimacy, not knowing her

daughter, and dreading the possible results of a Protestant alliance, had written in a fervid strain to Helena, warning her of the danger of allowing her heart to be gained by one of another creed, pointing out the obligations laid upon her as the representative of a Catholic family, adjuring her to place no further barrier in the way of that reunion between mother and daughter so earnestly desired, now so near at hand. The letter had been penned in a flight of enthusiasm, brought on more immediately by an hour's prostration in the Chapel of Ste. Dévote, and indirectly by a run of bad luck at *roulette*, and resentment after a fit of coldness on the part of Madame Fano.

Poor Helena, blind and mistaken, yet leaning with child-like trust upon the props her fancy had created! Were not faith and self-denial the very watchwords of her belief? Her confessor, her mother, the traditions in which she had been reared, and which had unconsciously moulded

her character, all commanded that she should put away the love that had grown so simply and mightily within her.

* * * * *

Warrender passed the hours in a state of mental tumult of which he had never before had any experience. He dined alone for the first time for several days, and afterwards smoked his cigar out of doors, shuddering inwardly at the prospect of a solitary evening and a wakeful night. Under other circumstances he would have gone to the Abbey. The intimacy had now become so great that formal invitations were hardly ever sent to Branches, Sir John declaring that he might take for granted the fact that they were always delighted to see him. There was a short cut through the Chase which considerably shortened the distance and let him into the grounds by a wicket gate, so that he could gain the terrace easily,

and informally join the small party usually assembled there. Sir John was always glad of a little variation from his nightly game of chess with Father Clifford, and liked lingering in the open air, talking over horses, dogs, and country matters with a congenial companion, while Helena's music floated softly out through the open window. What happy hours they had been ! Warrender thought thus with a sigh and a flutter of hope, bitterly regretting his rash words of that morning. But for his impetuosity he might have stolen another hour with his beloved.

In the face of her implied prohibition this was impossible. Some satisfaction might, however, be gained from a visit to the haunts which had become sacred to him for her sake. Exercise was a relief ; and before many minutes he had reached the outskirts of the Chase. There was a straight path through it, fenced by iron railings, and here he lingered, enjoying

the fragrance of leaf and flower, and soothed by the solitude and eeriness of the place. Leaving the wood, he crossed a part of the park and, after skirting a belt of shubbery, found himself in the grounds below the terrace. There was a bright moon shining, which lit up the front of the house and silvered the feathery clumps of pampas grass on the lawn. The night was still, and for that time of year unusually warm. Faint odours blended together; the air was like a bath of perfume. The shadows seemed strange and unearthly. Scarcely a leaf stirred. The whole scene was one of luxurious calm.

No sound came from the drawing-room, though the windows were wide open, letting a flood of soft light stream upon the gravel. To one side Warrender saw the outline of the cloisters and of a solemn-looking archway, and the old-fashioned garden against its sombre background of yews. Suddenly he remembered

Helena's words, spoken the first time they had met in the yew tree avenue, "I sit here sometimes on moonlight nights. . . . You can't think how beautiful it is then, such vivid contrasts of deep shadow and silvery light."

Upon such an evening as this, in such a spot, would it not be difficult to resist the pleadings of love? Was there not a probability that, like himself, Helena had gone forth to court the stillness of night? Instinct drew him towards the avenue. He felt like a thief stealing about the grounds, and was half ashamed of the impulse which had brought him hither. His feet fell almost noiselessly upon the turf. When he reached the pavilion he told himself that Fate had directed his steps. Here was the opportunity for which he had longed. Through a rift in the foliage the moon shed her rays full upon the shrine which Helena decorated daily. At the feet of the placid-faced image lay Helena's votive offering of

flowers—pure white carnations, such as that one she had given him in the morning—and before the shrine a white figure knelt. It was Helena. Her profile was towards him, the eyes upraised, the lips parted, her golden hair lying loose upon her neck. She was praying in low, tremulous tones. He could not distinguish any words, but he fancied once that a sob choked her utterance. In a moment he was beside the platform upon which she kneeled.

“ Helena ! ”

She rose to her feet, not in nervous haste or confusion, but calmly as though a summons which she expected had come, and stood looking down upon him from the greater height of her position. A heavenly radiance encircled her form. She seemed to him, in her white robes and with her pure, pale face, a young priestess, whose soul had been raised to a spiritual region remote from his grosser

longings. In truth, she felt creeping over her the sort of numbness which accompanies intense resolve. Her passion was all spent, exhausted in the wild supplications that had poured from her lips, when upon her return from the drive she had prostrated herself in the chapel—that ancient spot, sanctified by many memories, where other hearts had weaned themselves from love and life. She had eaten nothing, and in her mood of exaltation was scarcely conscious of bodily need or mental pain. Warrender's appearance did not surprise her. No occurrence could now have struck her as out of the ordinary course. She was glad that he had come. To-night she was strong. To-morrow reaction would probably have set in. Of this she was dimly aware, and wished to guard herself against any possibility of recantation.

Her beauty and dignity awed him. He hardly dared to speak; but a little quivering movement about her lips appealed to him, and

seemed to bring her to his human level. Words came fast and brokenly.

“I am wrong to have come here to-night after what you said this morning. But you would forgive me if you understood the state of suspense I have been in—if you knew how I love you. It has come upon me so much more strongly of late, perhaps because of your going away, or because of a change in you, I don’t know how to account for that, or whether it ought to make me fear or hope most. Perhaps the knowledge of my feeling has come to you suddenly, and you see only drawbacks and difficulties, or perhaps you wish to rebuke my presumption and are unwilling to cause me pain. However that may be, I love you with my whole heart, and even if it is presumption the love is too strong in me to be fought against or put down. Why should there be any question of putting it down? I know that I could make you happy if only

you cared for me; everything depends upon that. I have loved you ever since you were a little girl, when I saw you first, lying in the wood yonder and sobbing as if your heart were broken. I wanted to comfort you then, and to make your life less lonely . . . and ever since I have fancied that there was a sort of bond between us, something which drew us together, and made it impossible to believe that our lives could be lived quite separate from each other——”

He paused, and looked at her with eager anxiety, waiting for her to say some word. But she stood still and silent, like one in a dream.

“Of course, there are difficulties—discrepancies,” he went on with gathering agitation. “You are richer than I am, and you are expected to make a marriage by which you will gain even greater power and influence than are yours by right. I can’t offer you position, or wealth, or anything

worth your acceptance from a wordly point of view. Then there's the difference in religion—which to you I know would be the strongest bar. But does it matter? Do any of these things matter so long as there's love,—that overleaps, breaks down all obstacles? If there's no love on your side I am pleading to no purpose, and there's an end put to everything. But even if it were so, I should still have the feeling that in a kind of way you belonged to me—whether I married another woman or not. You would live in my heart as the little girl I longed so to comfort and to cherish.”

Helena drew a deep breath, and her eyes opened wide, the lids quivering, as though she were awakening to a sense of burden and of sorrowful necessity for speech or action. She looked at him for a moment with solemn sadness, in which there was no shadow of doubt, then withdrew her gaze, speaking hesitatingly and without emotion, as if she feared to be borne

further than she wished, were she to give her thoughts rein.

“You must think of me always as I was then ; for you will remember how ignorant I was, and will perhaps forgive my blindness now, and the pain I am causing you. You’ll remember the strong feeling I had then about my religion and my mother, and you will not wonder that those influences bind me now so strongly as to make what you wish an impossibility, even if—” She was going to say “even if I loved you,” but the prevarication died upon her lips.

“Oh, do not tell me that it is impossible till you have heard me out,” he urged, passionately. “I recollect your saying, even as long ago as that, that you would marry no one but a Catholic. But religion is more than the profession of a particular creed. Dogmas are only like garments that can be put on or off at will. They don’t touch the real heart and soul underneath. Goodness, spirituality, love, must always

be the same, no matter in what sort of church they are taught. But a man who would change the creed he had been bred in for the sake of winning the woman he loved, would be a mean-spirited, time-serving creature. What right would he have to be believed in? Where would there be any test for his sincerity of motive? That is what makes religion. Oh, believe me, if you can love me and will trust me, you will feel this as I do. If you only love me," he went on with deep earnestness, "I will try to convince you that religion is not a Molech, nor God an inhuman tyrant to be propitiated by the sacrifice of all our dearest wishes. Nature cannot be bound, and love is a law of nature; and it is not within our control to say who we shall or shall not love. You are no soulless automaton to be moved this way or that by the direction of your priest. You are a true and noble woman, made to be the crown and blessing of the man you love.

Helena, look at me, and if—oh, say if it is possible for you to love me. Look at me, Helena.”

But she kept her eyes bent on the ground. “It is of no use,” she said, drearily. “We only give each other pain. You know that it hurts me to make you unhappy. And you have been so good to me always! I can’t bear it.” . . . Her voice broke, and she clasped her hands tightly together. “If I could have foreseen, I would not have allowed you to be my friend. It would have been better if we had never met—if I had never had your sympathy.”

“Oh, do not say that,” he cried. “You too have felt that something drew us together. You have wanted me. . . . Oh, I *know* that you would never have reason to repent, if you would only trust me for always. I would respect your faith even in a greater degree than my own. I would never utter one word which could cause division. You should be free as air. Any conditions might be made.”

“Oh, no, no !” she exclaimed, her voice rising clear again from the extreme tension under which her powers were straining. “Nothing could make such a wrong right. How could there be any oneness, any true happiness in a marriage like that ? Let us part now, and—and think of each other tenderly—as friends—and try to spare each other pain. It is all difficult. Life is very sad. I don’t think we are meant to have any lasting happiness except what comes from doing what one believes to be right. The right is not easy to see. And when there are conflicting claims, we can but pray and trust to those wiser for guidance. But when it is clearly seen, as I see it now, the only duty is to cling to it. Do not urge me any more. Talking will not make any difference except to make us more unhappy. I can only give one answer—What you wish is impossible.”

“It *shall* not be impossible—if you love me,” said Warrender, insistently. “That is the real

question—not any other. Say that you do not love me, and I will leave you at once and vex you no more.”

Helena gazed at him with eyes full of despairing appeal. “Go then,” she said. “Leave me. Perhaps some day we may be friends again, till then, good-bye.” She held out her hands to him, and let them lie clasped in his for a moment, and her eyes clung to his face. Then, when with a passionate gesture he seemed about to plead once more, she loosed her hand and turned abruptly away from him. “Good-bye,” she repeated, as without another word or look she glided swiftly down the avenue towards the house.

* * * * *

He did not go to the Abbey on the following morning, nor did he write to her, or make any further appeal. It was all over. Upon considering the interview, and dispassionately weighing her speech and manner, he convinced

himself that the emotion she had shown was due entirely to regret at having caused him pain, and at having unknowingly misled him. Her last words, in which she had bidden him leave her, were, he told himself, tantamount to an admission that she did not love him. "I deceived myself," he thought a little bitterly, "though God knows it was not through vanity. Her sweetness and kindness meant only friendship. If she loved me she is too brave and true not to have acknowledged it. If she had loved me she would have treated me less like a brother."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HÔTEL DES ANGES.

DINNER had commenced when Warrender entered the *salle à manger* at the Hôtel des Anges, and made his way to where General Featherstone and his wife were sitting, and where a place had been kept vacant for him.

A *table d'hôte* at Monaco presents a still more remarkable variety of the human species than is to be seen in any other of the Riviera watering-places. Food for speculation and interest was here not wanting. Warrender's eyes sought Madame Fano but found her not, though the sight of two unappropriated chairs near the head of the table kept him in a state of expectation till the meal was concluded.

The scene was one of glitter, gas, and noise, inspiring sadness as well as amusement. Involuntarily Warrender thought of Browning's lines :

“ . . . till in due time, one by one,
Some with lives that came to nothing, some with deeds as
 well undone,
Death stepped tacitly and took them where they never
 see the sun.”

Opposite him was an English girl, with sad prominent eyes, thin cheeks, and bright hectic flush, so unconscious, and yet so unmistakably doomed. Beside her, a fair American, with that look of softness, brilliance, and artificiality, so characteristic of her nation as represented by her sex. She wore a fantastic arrangement of crimson plush upon her shoulders, and priceless diamonds at her neck, in her ears, and on her round, white wrists. Lower down, a woman in a black dress, cut after the pattern of Regent Street, with a bunch of tea-roses at her throat.

Her deep-set eyes, bistre-shaded, the melancholy expression of her rather coarsely cut lips, her free false laugh, as she made herself agreeable to the elderly, dissipated-looking gentleman who filled her glass with champagne, told their own sorrowful story, and renewed in Warrender the sense of pity and repulsion.

He turned with faint relief to another of these living vignettes—a portly man with a large white collar, and a magnificent chain meandering over an ample expanse of waistcoat, who sat upon the other side of the consumptive English girl. His fringe of white hair, beard, and whiskers, stood out like a nimbus from his red fleshy face and bald head. He had a look of “got up” honesty, of leering frankness and assumed suavity, inexpressibly disagreeable. But, at least, he was not a woman!

“These dear little birds, these innocent

little birds," he was saying in unctuous tones. "It goes to my heart to eat them. Cruelty to animal creation! The martyrdom of Nature! In my youth I lived, from principle, upon water biscuits and farinaceous food. But who acts up to conviction at Monte Carlo? When I find an honest man here I regard him as a gem, a phenomenon. As for the ladies—" He shrugged his shoulders expressively. "Now, sir," addressing a flashy, bejewelled Englishman of the "'Arry" type, "you are a gentleman of varied observation. What is your opinion of the relative tendency towards gambling of the two sexes?"

"Oh, I back the ladies." And "'Arry" leered unpleasantly in the direction of the American, who returned the glance with a cold stare. "I mean it as a compliment. They gamble with themselves. Now, marriage, you know—isn't a woman staking her life?"

"Ah," chuckled the fat gentleman, "it's

said that marriages are made in heaven. But you can't insure against Zéro coming up sometimes. Zéro is the devil's chance. *Garçon, portez l'autre chose.* I say, bring it back. What's the Greek—I mean the French—for sparrows? I never exercise my brain when I'm eating: it's bad for the digestion; that is one argument for marriage. One might make one's wife do all the hard work."

"A convenient combination of matter and mind," observed "'Arry."

The white-haired gentleman leaned forward and spoke to Warrender in German.

"I am English," coldly replied the latter.

"Ah, pardon me. The conformation of your head, the great width at the base of the forehead, a sign, by the way, of superior intellect, suggests the German origin. You have not been long at Monte Carlo; the place is hardly full yet. Next week, there will be another table, and you will see people eight deep

pitching money over each other's heads. Are you interested in *roulette*, sir? I myself have had thirty years' experience of gaming-tables and have worked out a system. It's a wonderful game. Chess is a child to it, the mystery of the number nine has never been satisfactorily explored. I have devoted my life to its study. I got as far as being able to tell the winning number seven times running, when I said to myself, 'You can go no further.' But a friend of mine has gone further. He is a Pole. The secret lies in the mystery of the nines. We shall work it together, and we shall share the profits; of course we *could* break the bank, and clean the whole thing out. But we ain't such fools as that. We shall content ourselves with making our £20,000 a year. It's nothing but a question of system, my dear sir. People who lose are those who play recklessly. The dear wife says, 'Oh, I think *rouge* will turn up.' The husband stakes, and his louis are swept

away, whereas if he had calculated his chances, he would have gone on *noir*."

"D-d-don't listen to him," confidentially stuttered a little red-whiskered man upon Warrender's right. "He's a s-s-swindler. Says he'll sell his s-s-system for five hundred francs. You must look out here, or you'll be cheated. D-d-don't you dine in the restaurant. You'll be charged t-t-two francs for a mutton-chop. My name is Bland, C-C-captain Bland. I'm with a party. Let us go to the Casino together. Let us all go in a b-b-body. Do you get tired of travelling? I do, you know. I've got C-c-cook's tickets, you know. People say they aren't a saving; but just you c-c-calculate the number of miles and the fares, and you'll see. I'm just stopping here to look at the g-g-ambling. *Roulette* is too scientific. *Trente et quarante*—that's the thing, you know. There's a lady here—she lives with a c-c-count, and she plays all day. At night

she is generally a little squiffy ; but when she is squiffy, she always wins. You follow her lead and you'll win too."

Captain Bland beamed with benevolent smiles under the happy conviction that he had armed a helpless fellow-traveller against the assaults of a set of thieves ; and turning to his party, whom Warrender perceived to be Americans, repeated emphatically, " Let us go in a b-b-body. They can't do us much harm if we go in a b-b-body."

" We are unfortunately placed this evening," remarked General Featherstone with apologetic stiffness. " The people in the hotel usually sit at the other table ; but we have been spending a few days at San Remo, and came back to find our seats occupied. I wanted to dine quietly in our salon, but my wife likes variety, and, I really believe, prefers this set to the other."

Mrs. Featherstone, leaning across her

husband, had a good deal to say upon the subject. Presently the meal came to an end, and a move was made to the reading-room. Three-quarters of an hour later, just as Mrs. Featherstone had begun to adjust her wraps, the door of the reading-room opened, and Mrs. Kilsyth and Madame Fano entered. The former looked flushed and agitated, but strikingly handsome, with a scarf of black lace becomingly shrouding her silvery hair. Madame Fano wore her bonnet, and carried a mantle of crimson plush upon her arm. She approached Mrs. Featherstone. "May I walk with you to the Casino? My mother is not going down." A chorus of exclamations greeted the announcement.

"It is true," said Mrs. Kilsyth in a tone of dejection. "I am cleaned out. Happily the new year begins to-morrow. My luck is gone. The fount is dried up: silver has no effect; a louis is useless; it requires dirty,

crumpled notes to set the stream running, and, alas ! there are none forthcoming. I am going to stay here and play whist. Mr. Braunstein will be my partner. We shall play for that excellent thing which you cannot see, but which you can feel, which is without value to some, of inestimable worth to others—thrown into a gutter, and sold for the jewels of Golconda. They call it love.”

Warrender was standing in the background. Mrs. Featherstone motioned him by a look to her side, ere she addressed Madame Fano.

“We shall be delighted to take care of you. But may I introduce to you a friend of mine, and a friend, too, if I mistake not, of your sister ? Mr. Warrender, Madame Fano.”

Varuna bowed. Then her eyes, meeting those of Warrender, shot a startled gleam, and the colour rose vividly to her cheek. She held out her hand.

“Of course, Mr. Warrender, your name is familiar to me. I am very glad to make your acquaintance. I did not know who you were this afternoon. You brought me luck : and I have not properly expressed my gratitude.”

“On the contrary, I was fortunate in merely enabling you to profit by a happy inspiration. But you did not continue playing?”

“The tables were too crowded. And I have my own code of signals which tells me when to go on and when to stop. Thirteen is not usually a favourable number to me.”

“You are superstitious then, madame?”

“No, not in the common acceptation of the word. But I believe that the unseen universe, like the physical, is governed by fixed laws, only it requires a sixth sense to recognise them.”

“You consider that the chances of *roulette* are regulated by the Higher Powers?”

Madame Fano slightly elevated her eyebrows. “Ah! you speak ironically. What are the Higher Powers? We don’t know. But we know there are systems and laws.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Featherstone, “my husband will certainly not exercise his musical sense with any satisfaction this evening unless we start off at once. He is particularly anxious to hear Borghini play his solo on the violoncello in the first part of the programme.”

The night was clear and balmy—here in the dimness of road and shrubbery, full of tender shadows and soft whisperings of leaves and insects. The air kissed wooingly, and was laden with a strange fragrance, such as might be exhaled by some deep-hearted exotic flower. It was a night that stirred the soul to sweet, fantastic tumult, and in

which the pulses throbbed in yearning, half spiritual, half earthly.

Now the party emerged from a shady belt of garden into the great *place*. At one end rose the Casino, its domed roof outlined against a moonlit sky, with carriages passing to and fro before the portico, and misty figures ascending and descending the broad flight of steps. Innumerable gas lamps shone like stars in the shadowy space, illuminating dusky parterre, marble balustrades, and fountains in play, while here and there, deepening the surrounding obscurity, the ghastly rays of an electric globe imparted a touch of unearthliness to the scene. Stillness and wild solitude blended curiously with the fret and fever of human life. The grim heights, majestic and time-worn, which towered in the background, looked sullen sentinels of this pleasure-ground of vice and frivolity. Nature, serene and chaste,

seemed to rebuke silently the meretricious devices of Art. Far to the south stretched the sea, pallid and moon-tipped; and in the foreground, relieved by the white gleam of marble terraces, rose dull groves of eucalyptus and mimosa, and clumps of feathery palms.

CHAPTER IX.

WHY DO YOU PLAY?

BOTH Warrender and Madame Fano paused involuntarily.

“Is it not Thomas Hardy,” she said, “who calls this place, ‘a vast cosmopolitan playground, like a conservatory with the sky for its dome’? and another novelist says that it is ‘the moral sewer of Europe.’ Oh, but one does see and hear sickening sights and sounds! I never believed thoroughly in human degradation till I beheld it here.”

“Yet,” exclaimed Warrender impulsively, “you remain, and you play. Oh, why——”

He paused, amazed at his own temerity. She moved on without speaking, and for some

moments he fancied he had offended her. At last she said abruptly, and with more energy than she had yet shown :

“You might as well ask me why I live—why I have got the sort of temperament which makes gambling a necessity to me.”

“Perhaps,” said Warrender, “the riddle is not so hard as it seems.”

“No,” she replied, “I read it by a light of my own. I saw in some book the other day a comparison between human beings and stones set rolling down a hill by an act of determination over which the stone had certainly no control. We don’t come into the world of our own accord ; we don’t choose which particular vices or virtues we shall inherit from our ancestors. I didn’t choose to be fond of play. I am the result of a far reaching chain of causes and effects, and for me to be different, the whole world would have had to be different.”

“That is a depressing theory. I don’t like it.”

“Yes it is depressing. I don’t like it either; but I feel its truth.”

Then he continued, “There are living forces with which we come daily into contact. Even if humanity were composed of irresponsible atoms there would be play for design in its grouping. Madame Fano, are you one of those feverish persons who make doubts out of certainties, and certainties out of doubts? Isn’t all life a great why? We know not whence we come or whither we go: and if we did, the knowledge would not affect our present condition. Of what use is it to question that restless, longing, probing inner *I* which laughs at itself, and pities itself? It strains after pure heights that the body cannot reach, and beholds with eyes which we cannot blind-fold, the pitiful contrasts and incongruities, the grim horrors, the grotesque mockeries, the bitterness, the sweetness, and the pathos, that make life so tangled a skein? It will never

give me a satisfying reply ; yet the very realisation that there is this part of me, as real and yet as ethereal as the scent of a flower, which loves, joys, suffers, nay, even sins, lifts me above the brute level ; and the exquisite happiness it brings me, consoles me also for the pain I endure because of it."

He was looking at her earnestly. The lights from the Casino flashed upon her face. The lips seemed trembling, and parted in a flickering smile.

"I might remind you of Voltaire's comparison between the immortality of the soul and the song of a nightingale. But I am not one of his disciples. And here we are at the scene of contamination."

As she spoke a carriage drew up at the entrance and deposited its occupants, a fresh muscular young English nobleman, his handsome wife, and the distinguished-looking mas-

culine attendant who is sometimes considered a necessity by the woman of society.

The lady paused a moment to address Madame Fano. As she ascended the flight of steps, Varuna drew back and lingered in the *place*.

“That trio,” she said, “comes here every year. You should go to Lady Arniston, Mr. Warrender, and ask her why she gambles. She has no need of money, and yet I have seen her clutch her winnings as greedily as the veriest hag in the Casino. She professes unbounded devotion to her husband—and also to her friend. She has charming children, everything in the world to make her happy. I have no doubt that she will chatter complacently about the vice at Monte Carlo—the vice which she encourages by her presence and example—and the misery which she would not alleviate if she could. Life would be without zest were there no tragedies. I know a great many women

like her. There's your friend Mrs. Featherstone, who finds it desirable to pick up the Monte Carlo jargon which is talked glibly in some circles. None of them have any sympathy with the unfortunates, who, driven to seek distraction from wretchedness, or urged by a worse necessity, come here year after year—slaves, madwomen—in their sane moments, loathing the chains they have not power to break. Don't you know that there's a craving for excitement as keen as that of the dipsomaniac for alcohol? Don't ask me again why I remain here. And now let us go in, and you shall make your own observations."

They entered, and mingled with the motley throng pacing the vestibule, and breathing the heavy odours of stale scent and cigarette smoke. The rooms were even more thronged than in the afternoon. Lord Bretland approached as they stood watching the players at *trente et quarante*, and spoke to Madame Fano with

an air of interest and deferential homage, which surprised Warrender, and was in marked contrast to his usual listless manner.

“I did what you wished and saw your pensioner off by the *rapide* from Nice this morning. She is, now at least, out of temptation’s reach. You may congratulate yourself upon having rescued a fellow-creature from something worse than suicide. But Madame Fano,” he added, turning to Warrender, “is one of those persons who do good by stealth and call it evil.”

“It is you rather who have cause for self-congratulation,” replied she. “Without your aid to-day, I should have been powerless. Thank you. How are the tables going?” She spoke abruptly, and as if she would have avoided the subject.

Lord Bretland entered upon a technical account of the proceedings, which was but half intelligible to Warrender. At its conclusion,

Madame Fano handed the latter a little rouleau of gold. "Please put it down for me wherever you choose."

He protested that he was ignorant of the game, and knew not how the chances were running.

"That is of no consequence. Stake at haphazard on either red or black."

"At least let me bank with you, and I shall have the satisfaction of halving your losses."

"No," she replied coldly. "I never bank with any one."

He watched two or three rounds, then laid the stake on black. It was doubled; she motioned to him to let it remain. The same result followed again and again; after the fourth time, he gathered in, and gave her a mass of glittering coin.

"Go on," she said. Her eyes were sparkling, and she smiled at him in a way which set his nerves tingling. He was so excited that his

fingers trembled as he gathered up the gold. There flashed through his mind the recollection of Lord Bretland's words. Was she then the victim of a vile enchantment, which he perhaps might be destined to break? Nay, were they not both under a spell? There was something horrible in the clink of the gold, the relentless swaying of the rakes, the impassive tones of the croupiers. Again that dream-like feeling overcame him. All the time he was winning largely. At the first reverse, she stopped him.

"That will do. See how prudent I am this evening. It is only when I stake myself that I lose, and become desperate, and go on doubling. Now I shall play no more. Presently, I want to talk to you about my sister Helena."

She was observing him closely, and noticed that, as she uttered the name, he seemed to be awakened to new and painful consciousness.

His lip quivered, and there was a slight nervous contraction of his heavy upper eyelid.

"I know more about you than you perhaps imagine" she said very softly. "*I* have the sixth sense, and I don't think that my instinct erred when it singled you out this afternoon. And you have been winning. It is only those in sympathy with me, who win for me. You may, if you choose, be my friend."

It was impossible to smile at the superstitious credulity which her words betrayed. There was in her manner a simplicity, an almost childish appeal, which affected him curiously. "I could desire no higher distinction," he exclaimed with earnestness.

She shook her head very sadly.

At this moment General Featherstone interrupted them. "Madame Fano, I know you are fond of music. Adam's *Overture to Giralda* is to be performed presently; it is worth

hearing. My love," turning to his wife, "will you not come ?"

"Oh, my dear Edward," cried Mrs. Featherstone, "how often must I tell you that I have really no time for listening to music at Monte Carlo ? One hears plenty of it in London. Give me two hundred francs, darling, and meet us at the restaurant in half-an-hour."

General Featherstone obediently furnished the required sum, and departed alone, Madame Fano, having excused herself from accompanying him on the plea that the heat had given her a headache.

"Isn't it a mercy that my husband considers himself a musical genius !" murmured Mrs. Featherstone. "He would be bored to death if he could not go to the concerts and crib other people's ideas for his own compositions. Now, Lord Bretland, there are quantities of people here who have histories written on their faces. I am told that Cora Pearl is in the

room. Point her out to me. And who is that pale-faced, striking-looking woman in black lace, with the wonderful eyes, and the diamond star fastening her bonnet? I am sure that I have seen her photograph in the shop windows. She is the sort of person who makes one think of Mary Stuart, Cleopatra, and all the rest of them, don't you know? A dethroned queen, for whose sake men would still dare and die! There is something about her, which, if I were a man, would completely turn my head. It is not only her beauty, but a sort of recklessness, melancholy mystery—I don't know what. Tell me her name."

"That, Mrs. Featherstone—" Lord Bretland put up his eyeglass and critically examined the lady indicated. "That is the famous Nadine Princess Titchakoff, the most intriguing woman in Europe; still one of the most beautiful; certainly one of the most fascinating; and perhaps, without exception, the most

wretched. Of course you have seen her photograph, and of course you must have heard of her in England. A queer story about her once got into the society papers. But since then she has made herself even more notorious. Her house was the rendezvous of the Nihilists. Prince Titchakoff was arrested and sent to Siberia, and scandal whispers that she only escaped sharing his exile through her influence in political quarters. She arrived here two days ago. A certain Grand Duke is in attendance. It is said that the best part of her life is spent in a morphine stupor. She lives only when the sun begins to wane. Unfortunate lady! Morphine and Monte Carlo, conspiracy and dynamite! This is what these dramatic creatures comes to. Ah, Mrs. Featherstone, let me give you one word of advice. Don't cultivate the more subtle forms of emotion. They are blighting in their effects."

Mrs. Featherstone was eagerly raking in her winnings, and did not appear to have heard the conclusion of this softly uttered tirade. Varuna, who had been conversing with a heavy moustached Russian—a man easily recognised among the motley crowd at Monte Carlo—turned wearily to Warrender.

“Will you take me somewhere for a breath of cooler air?”

CHAPTER X.

IN THE GARDENS OF THE CASINO.

THEY walked on to the terrace. The soft wind from the sea blew caressingly upon Varuna's face as she leaned upon the balustrade.

"Tell me now about Helena."

Warrender hesitated, overpowered by repugnance to associate the sacred remembrance of this girl, who seemed to him now far away as one of Heaven's angels, with the varied impressions and pungent, bewildering sensations which his brief intercourse with her sister had wrought in his being. Varuna appeared to divine his mood.

"I understand: you are unwilling to describe

Helena by commonplaces ; and to do so in any other terms would seem—inappropriate. It is so difficult for a man to speak of a woman who interests him deeply to a relative of hers, with whom he is hardly acquainted.”

“I do feel this difficulty,” answered Warrender, constrained to frankness by her searching gaze.

“And especially,” continued Varuna, “when the questioner and her surroundings are out of harmony with the subject of the conversation. But, since you know my sister intimately, you must be aware that she has an enthusiastic attachment to her mother and to me.”

“It would be quite impossible not to admire Miss Kilsyth’s character,” said Warrender, speaking with effort : “her nature is full of the purest womanly sentiment.”

“Yet,” said Varuna, “from what I remember of Sir John Kilsyth, there could have been but little in him to draw this forth. I may

be prejudiced. He disliked us intensely—my mother and me—though, to do him justice, I believe that he never tried to set Helena against us, but simply ignored our existence. A narrow-minded fox-hunting squire, to whom the higher world of thought and imagination was a closed book. Was it not so?”

“Yes,” replied Warrender, thoughtfully. “Their natures were quite unsympathetic, and I fancy that Miss Kilsyth’s confessor, though I believe him to be a sincere and well-meaning man, acted as a sort of buffer to keep them apart. Your sister’s life has been barren of affection. It is not surprising that she should have lavished her warmest feelings upon her religion and upon a mother and sister whom she could only love from a distance.”

“There is something bitter in your tone,” said Varuna questioningly. “Her religion! Yes, my sister has a great deal of spiritual fervour; she has lived among English Protestants, and

has always considered herself cruelly ill-used in having been separated from my mother, whom as a fervent Catholic she regards also as a martyr. You are thinking that her enthusiasm has been wasted in a dream, and that soon she will be cruelly awakened from her illusions. But my mother has a singular power of winning and retaining affection, and Helena may not be disappointed. Of course you know that she is coming to live with us here."

"To live with you! At Monte Carlo!" exclaimed Warrender.

"At Monte Carlo, in our villa yonder. She will lead our life, unless indeed she be so independent of will and clear of intellect as to choose her own path. She will breathe the atmosphere of the Casino which you already find so corrupt; she will be introduced to our friends—if we have any friends. She will be taught to play *roulette*. It is possible that in

her nature too may lie the seeds of that fatal passion which has descended from parent to child. Mr. Warrender, we seem always to get back to the same point. There is no use in trying to contend against inherited propensity."

"Oh no, no!" he said impulsively, and with real sorrow in his voice. "Don't speak in this way. Madame Fano, you have got some morbid idea in your mind which I don't follow. I wish that I could. I wish that I could uproot it."

"That would be impossible. I will try to make you understand my bent. You see my mother, you see me. You don't know the circumstances of our lives, and these I cannot tell you; but I can take you further back. My great-grandfather was a Frenchman. He first played away his patrimony, then staked his honour, and at last—having nothing left—an hour before he was taken to the guillotine, bartered in a jest his chance of

heaven. My grandfather, a child then, was smuggled away to South America. He married there, and came back. The seeds of gambling were in him. It is not many years since he might have been seen in the lowest Paris *cafés* working out imaginary systems with straws and peas, and wearing the word 'revenge' written on his cap. Well, what can one expect? Nature cannot be defied. Mr. Warrender, I would have spared my sister Helena this ordeal, had it been in my power. I did make an effort—I offered to winter in Rome in order that she might be saved from the contaminating influences of this place. But it was of no use; events—everything—worked against the plan. And now I don't even wish to go. When a thing is fated, it must be. To struggle is only waste of energy."

"I think you exaggerate the danger; Miss Kilsyth's temperament is more self-contained than you imagine."

“Possibly.”

“But why of no use?” asked Warrender eagerly, reverting to her former words.

“This year, which begins to-morrow, will be the most critical in my life. It would be defying destiny were I to attempt to pass it anywhere but in Monaco. Happiness, peace, nay, existence itself, for me depend upon the chances of the gaming-table. You smile at me. But all the ridicule in the world wouldn’t alter the conviction which has grown in me with the years. There are times when one seems to have within one the power of a prophet or a seer. Often when I am standing at the *roulette* table, the feeling comes over me—a sort of darkness and terror, and then bright vision. It is as though I had lived it all before, and it were coming again surely and swiftly.” She paused and drew in her breath with a little gasp: then laughed softly. “How strange it is my telling

you all this—but often a stranger makes the best confessor.”

“At least,” he said, “you may trust me!”

She laughed again. “Oh! such confidences are not sacred. If you repeated them, the worst people could say of me would be that I am a little mad; and probably they say that already. Do you see my hand? The moon is so bright that you might almost read its lines. A long time ago in Venice my fate was partially foretold. You know that the Venetians are adepts in palmistry. Several of my sibyl’s predictions have been already fulfilled; why not the rest? But my ground for belief is firmer than that. Character makes fate; the sixth sense gives insight into character. Mine is the true gambler’s hand; my life the stake with which I play. After this year I will never enter a gaming room again.”

“Madame Fano, you perplex me strangely,” said Warrender, almost forgetting Helena in the interest which her impulsive words excited.

“How?”

He paused before replying. “Your nature is so noble. Though my knowledge of you can hardly be measured by hours, I have seen enough, in trivial incidents—words, gestures—to assure me that you were created for high purposes. And surely it is beneath you to be influenced seriously by the prophecies of a so-called soothsayer!”

“Ah, so far our minds may march together, but there we diverge and become inhabitants of different spheres. Let us leave the subject. Do you remain long at Monte Carlo?”

“A few weeks perhaps. Possibly only a few days. Amusement is a very indefinite object, and it is my only one at present.”

“I had fancied from my sister Helena’s letters, in which she has mentioned you occasionally, that your objects in life were very definite.”

“I had one a short time ago upon which my career turned. I wished to marry your sister. Madame Fano, you compel candour.”

“I am glad of that—in this case at least. If even mere acquaintances could sometimes stand towards each other, ‘soul to soul, as hand to hand,’ the world might be a better and happier place. Now will you admit that sympathy is beyond what can be seen and touched and reasoned upon? I sympathise with you, Mr. Warrender, though I have no right to do so, for I have never loved.”

She uttered the words, with her eyes turned seaward, sadly, calmly, as though she were merely stating a not supremely interesting fact in her history.

“And my sister Helena did not love you?” she added slowly.

“No. At all events she refused to become my wife.”

“Perhaps at her confessor’s command. You

are a Protestant, she is a Catholic, and she is wealthy."

"That has been my deep regret. Had we stood upon the same level her heart might have had freer play. For I was misguided enough to fancy that she cared for me, and that if there were any conflict in her mind, love would prove victorious. I was entirely mistaken. Her rejection was so cold and passionless that I might have been suing at the feet of one of the saints in her oratory."

"And you accepted the refusal without argument or entreaty?"

"A man does not *entreat* for love. It is the irresistible impulse towards each other of two souls—a union in which there is neither conscious giving nor receiving."

"I thought that only poets analysed love. And you are not a poet; you are a man of science. So then, it is true that love transforms every man into a poet—while the fever

lasts. Love is a fever, is it not—and most dangerous when caught after first youth.”

Varuna spoke dreamily. Her voice seemed to go sighing to the night as she bent forward with face upturned and melancholy eyes gazing at the stars. He watched her, his mind rocked upon uncertainty, in a vague manner feeling himself at the mercy of some strange wind or current which might bear him into unknown seas. She looked at him suddenly : their eyes met.

“A fever,” he repeated absently. “Yes, perhaps.”

“I have always observed,” said Varuna, turning to him with her enigmatic smile, “that men in love take the greatest pains to impress upon one that love is a kind of spiritual essence of the most refined quality, unknowable except from experience, yet the most positive, perfect, and glorious thing in or out of the world, while all the time their manner unconsciously

conveys that it is, after all, a most perishable article, of the earth earthy, and singularly quick to evaporate."

"You offered me your sympathy a few moments ago," said Warrender, piqued. "Now you withdraw it, and make me a butt for cynicism."

"Oh! am I cynical? I did not mean to be so. My experience of men in love has been unfortunate, I suppose. I must not, however, let you think me quite world-worn. I have a few illusions, a few faiths left. One is a faint religious sentiment—I am a Catholic, you know, though I don't often enter the confessional, and am not, like my mother, in the habit of offering up candles to invoke a blessing upon my play. This would prompt me to discountenance a marriage between you and my sister; but, on the other hand, though I scoff, I have a lurking belief in love: and then, has not instinct pointed you out to me as a friend?

A great French musician once assured me that there were but three things in the world worth living for—*‘l’amour, l’amitié, et le travail.’* Love I know not. Friendship I understand as a grateful possibility. And work—ah! that talisman to guard one against oneself can never be possessed by me. But trust in my will to be of service to you. And I have a kind of right to be interested in your happiness.” She spoke in a different tone, and her voice softened inexpressibly.

“The strongest right——” he began.

“Oh no. You don’t quite understand me. I did not mean in the conventional sense. In that I have none. But instinct establishes a kind of claim. Sympathy, however, presupposes community of experience. To feel another’s sorrow one must have suffered in like manner.”

“Then you, madame—have you been so fortunate as not to know suffering?”

“Oh, I have been wretched, most miserable

at times. But not in the way you have suffered of late. You know I said that I had never loved. If, as I suspect, Helena loves you, and has been coerced in the matter by her priest, you shall know the truth; and I will help you to be happy as far as lies in my power. Come, let us join the others now."

She moved on; while he, bewildered by the rapid variations in her manner, was almost glad to be spared the necessity for replying.

They found Mrs. Featherstone, her husband, Lord Bretland and some others, who were to join the New Year's Eve party, sipping iced drinks outside the restaurant, and professing readiness to return to the hotel.

CHAPTER XI.

ENTER COLONEL CAZALETTE.

THE clock had struck half-past eleven when they entered Mrs. Featherstone's drawing-room. The room was decorated with flowers, the table laid, and Mrs. Kilsyth and Mr. Braunstein, assisted by a waiter, were engaged in the concoction of punch. Mrs. Kilsyth asked eagerly for news of the evening's proceedings.

"A run on red," she cried, in her odd, excitable manner, "and I was not there ! Alas ! alas ! my doll is stuffed with sawdust. I'll get me to a nunnery—oh these difficulties of life are hard to support ! Well," she added, making a little grimace at her daughter, "this naughty child who was obliged to stay at home has won

a great deal of love and no money. I hope that the stern mamma has been more fortunate."

Madame Fano, the play of whose features was becoming to Warrender a source of the deepest interest, smiled much as an indulgent parent might smile upon an unreasonable daughter, whose vagaries might be met with amused toleration but were at the same time a source of sorrow and perplexity. She placed before her mother a little case containing a *rouleau* of gold.

"There is my New Year's present. You see that I wish to make amends for my harshness though I ought to say that it is Mr. Warrender who deserves your thanks, for I owe my luck to him."

Mrs. Kilsyth fingered the coins with the enjoyment of a child to whom a new plaything has been presented. "Now, for a few hours at least," she exclaimed, "I am independent of my bankers. Money, as Bulwer says — General

Featherstone, I am quite aware that accuracy in quotation is not my strong point ; but, like your wife, I have a mind above small details— ‘ Money is power, love also ; for even gratitude can be bought by money.’ That was a man who understood life and its requirements. And now let us stir the punch.”

Several other guests had dropped in, and the room resounded with conversation and laughter.

“ De ponch is ready ! ” cried the German gentleman, who had been assiduously flourishing the ladle. “ It wants but one thing, and dat is drinking.”

Madame Fano had moved apart and stood by the open window, her thoughtful eyes gazing into the moonlit garden.

The minute-hand pointed towards midnight.

“ I see him ; he is coming ! ” cried Mr. Braunstein. “ He is a beautiful leetle New Year ! He is small and thin and lofely. Leetle New Year, I drink your health ! and I ask you

to give us all the best of good things—health, wealth and happiness !”

A faint chime sounded in the distance, and echoed through the *salon*. There was a momentary pause. Then glass clinked prettily against glass. Every face round the table smiled, yet underlying the surface brightness there was upon each a shade of pensiveness. Mrs. Featherstone turned from Lord Bretland to whisper softly in her husband's ear with a sweetness which seemed to declare that an effete civilisation had not robbed her heart of its bloom. General Featherstone, standing erect at the head of the table, gave forth the toast with an air of old-fashioned solemnity, and in a few appropriate words— “To the New Year, and may he bring to all who welcome him here, health, happiness and prosperity.”

No one observed while the toast was being drunk, and the youngest born of Time ushered into his kingdom, that Warrender and Madame

Fano, half shrouded by the window drapery, stood together lending no voice to the invocation.

There was silence between them. It was she who first broke it. "We are outcasts. The New Year has passed by us, and we have made no effort to gain his favour. Mr. Warrender I won't offer you the conventional greetings. I won't venture to prophesy that you will win the woman you love. My blessing might be ill-omened, and carry only bitterness and misfortune."

"The assurance of your goodwill, Madame Fano, is worth more than prophecies. You said a little while ago that I had brought you luck to-day. At least, you will not think my words meaningless if I say from my heart that I hope this critical year may bring you happiness."

"Happiness," she repeated. "Not riches, not prosperity, but the one impossible thing in all the world—for me. It is a question of

temperament, Mr. Warrender. Only tranquil people are happy, and my disposition is one of unrest."

She moved towards the laughing circle. The light of the chandelier fell upon her as she stood sheathed in her crimson mantle, with the grave, troubled look ageing and hardening her face.

"Varuna," cried Mrs. Kilsyth, "neither you nor Mr. Warrender have drunk to the New Year. How can you expect to be fortunate in your future undertakings? Come, the punch is excellent. Mr. Braunstein and I deserve to be complimented upon our skill."

Madame Fano folded her arms and shook her head.

"Too late, mother. Mrs. Featherstone, I am not an amiable guest, but you will forgive me if I leave you; my head still aches from the heat of the Casino."

There was a universal remonstrance. "Not yet, Madame Fano," said General Featherstone,

striking some familiar chords upon the piano. "My wife has a few sentimental regrets on the score of her native land. Let us drink to the health of absent friends, and you will lead us in the solo of, 'Auld Lang Syne.'"

"But I should not do so with any fervour. Sentiment is a quality which I don't possess. I have no native land, no pleasing associations with the past, no absent friends to regret."

As the words passed her lips Warrender observed that she lifted her eyes suddenly, and started, growing visably paler. An exclamation half rose, and was checked. Following her look he perceived the figure of a stranger in the doorway, a tall man of foreign aspect, with delicate aquiline nose, clear sallow face, close-cropped vandyke beard, and full, slightly prominent grey eyes, which surveyed the group with a smiling, benignant expression.

"Colonel Cazalette!" ejaculated Mrs. Kilsyth, in a tone low, but sufficiently

audible to startle Warrender. She moved abruptly from the table ; and, almost as if she wished for the moment to avoid recognition, took up her position slightly behind the Englishman. He noticed that she appeared discomposed, and placed a chair for her in the embrasure of the window. Her hands trembled. She appeared conscious that she was betraying an unwarrantable excitement.

“I have a weak heart,” she murmured ; “any sudden arrival always upsets me. Mr. Warrender,” she went on, with that sudden droop of her mouth and composing of her features which he had before noticed, while she spoke in an even rapid tone, her eyes fixed all the time upon Colonel Cazalette. “I have not as yet been able to ask you any questions. I have heard of you from my daughter Helena. You and Helena are interested in each other !”

“I am interested in Miss Kilsyth,” corrected Warrender.

“ And she in you. Oh yes, I assure you she mentioned you frequently ; but a friendship of that kind never outlasts the marriage of either of the persons concerned. Now tell me, Mr. Warrender, is there any likelihood of my daughter’s marriage ? ”

“ None that I know of, Mrs. Kilsyth. At present it seems most improbable.”

“ You are sure of that ? How you relieve me ! I dreaded the Protestant influence and—She has perhaps said to you that she would only marry a Catholic ? ”

“ Miss Kilsyth has certainly expressed that determination,” said George stiffly.

“ Ah, the Cardinal will rejoice. Cardinal —— you perhaps know him. He is here—a great friend of Colonel Cazalette and of my own.” Her tone changed suddenly. “ I thought Colonel Cazalette was at Paris,” she said, almost fiercely. “ Lord Bretland told me that he was not to be here for a week yet. But I am very glad ”—with a furtive

glance at Warrender—"very glad indeed. Do you know Colonel Cazalette? He is a delightful person! an old friend of ours, and so zealous—the most perfect combination of the world and the Church—not that he is in the Church—oh no, of course not; but so devout—and such an admirable photographer." She repeated the last sentence with an intensity which strengthened Warrender's doubts as to her sanity—"such an admirable photographer!"

Meanwhile the new comer had advanced, bowing with the sweetest courtesy and self-possession. "Ah, Madame Fano, I am grieved to hear that cruel statement uttered by you. But I am here to prove myself a present, and not an absent friend. Mrs. Featherstone, accept my apologies for this intrusion. I arrived only an hour ago, and have ventured to claim the privileges of our last year's acquaintanceship in Paris that I might offer you my congratulations and best wishes for the new year."

“I must say,” exclaimed Mrs. Featherstone, “delighted as I am to see you, Colonel Cazalette, that your words are more soothing to the nerves than your actions. There is something very uncanny and Mephistopheles-like in this sudden midnight apparition. Are we all acting in a melodrama, and have we been going through an appropriate New Year’s Eve prologue? First of all, Mr. Warrender drops down from the clouds. Secondly, Madame Fano, with his assistance, makes an extraordinary *coup*. Thirdly, at the close of the first act, enter Colonel Cazalette: the hero of the piece. Here we are. The principal personages occupy the stage: a becomingly diversified chorus ranges itself in the rear. Lord Bretland, you and I are the nonentities, whose part in the drama is to fill in gaps and furnish cues. Festive scene: a faint suggestion of tragedy in the background. Strike up, Edward. The chorus advances.”

She placed herself in a theatrical attitude,

Lord Bretland followed suit. Mr. Braunstein ladled out several glasses of punch, and with comic gravity presented one to each of the chorus. Madame Fano's stately greeting to Colonel Cazalette was drowned by the ringing notes of the drinking-song in *Traviata*, which, led by Mrs. Featherstone, pealed through the *salon*.

But the night had changed. A wind had risen with apparent suddenness, and, sweeping chilly through the open window, extinguished one of the candles upon the supper-table. The slight occurrence seemed to heated imaginations ominous. Mrs. Kilsyth shuddered, and Mr. Braunstein stepped back and closed the window. The operatic music swelled louder. An element of affectation and artificial mirth replaced the former sweet, subdued gaiety. Shadows, moonlight, vague sentiment, tender memories of the dying year—all had vanished. The spirit of the scene had assumed another shape, and it was

curious to reflect that Colonel Cazalette, with his saint-like profile and courtly bearing, was the magician to whose entrance the transformation was due. Varuna also appeared to have caught the infection of the hour. Her welcome to Cazalette had struck Warrender as cold and constrained. Her air had been haughty and listless. Now she took up her part in the scene, and sang and acted the duet with Cazalette after a fashion which would not have disgraced a professional singer. Presently she turned towards her mother, who still held herself in the background, and with charming cordiality indicated Cazalette's presence.

Mrs. Kilsyth rose, held out her hand, and made two or three wandering remarks with a forced sprightliness which was but a poor imitation of her former vivacity. Her manner might have passed currency with any less interested observers than Varuna and Warrender. As it was she looked uneasy, and there passed through

his mind a startled sense of something amiss. Cazalette with perfect tact, and with an air of tender protectiveness that was intended to appeal vicariously to Varuna, drew Mrs. Kilsyth slightly aside and discoursed upon agreeable nothings till she had apparently quite recovered her composure. The rest of the party had gathered round the piano. Again Warrender and Madame Fano stood apart.

“My mother is not quite herself to-night,” remarked the latter in a disturbed tone. “We have not seen Colonel Cazalette for some years ; and he is connected with an event which shook my mother’s nerves sadly. I mean the death of my husband.”

As she spoke the last sentence without a sigh or falter, Varuna turned her thoughtful gaze full upon Warrender as though she wished him to learn from it the secret of her lonely, troubled life.

CHAPTER XII.

NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS.

WARRENDER slept badly that night.

The partitions in the Riviera hotels are thin, and he fancied that there came from the room next that which he occupied a sound as of suppressed weeping. The thought disturbed him, and, after his first troubled doze, banished slumber. When silence fell upon that part of the house he was still restless, and full of strange excitement.

It seemed to him that since three o'clock that afternoon he had experienced sensations which might give piquancy to a lifetime. He was not prone to self-analysis. His tendencies lay towards action rather than introspection ; but

to-night his very nature seemed unhinged, and wonder at the rapid transformation from listless despondency to vivid interest, which had taken place in his being, forced him into a groove of thought foreign to his character. Why the change? He knew not. Helena, the pivot upon which a few weeks since existence had appeared to turn, was not now more near to him than when—pale, still, and without sign of strong emotion—she had bidden him leave her. They were parted for ever. She had never loved him. Probably now she bestowed upon him no tenderer thought than a passing regret for the pain she had caused him. No, she had never loved him. In his fit of reaction, after the blind confidence which had so misinterpreted her sweet friendliness and shy consciousness of a peculiar link between them, he had so dwelt upon this idea that it had become a conviction. Yet Madame Fano's insinuation of priestly coercion, though by no

means a new suggestion, took fresh shape in his mind, and opened the door to torturing hopes and bewildering fears. He stood again on the borderland of pain and rapture. His memory was a chaos of confused impressions, in which past and present contradicted each other, and underlying all was the feeling that some subtle and extraordinary transformation had taken place in himself. He seemed to be gazing at Helena with regretful eyes across a gulf which ardent longing hardly bridged. He had changed. But how, and why?

And she was coming to Monte Carlo. In a short time, if he remained, he must be again thrown closely into her society. Would it not be the truest wisdom to accept his fate, and to make a supreme effort to stifle vain regrets in fresh and absorbing occupation? The horizon of life was not bounded by love, nor was he a pining boy to be crushed by a first disappointment. Granted that Helena Kilsyth was the

one woman in the world whom he would ever call wife, the pursuit of science and exploration still possessed charms, and at least friendship remained to him for consolation.

The thought of friendship evoked Madame Fano's image, if, indeed, during the long night watches, it could be said to have ever faded into indistinctness. There was in her attitude towards him something of appeal which touched all that was most chivalrous in his nature. Apart from her irresistible fascination, she had the claim of being Helena's sister; the claim of a woman helpless and dumbly seeking to be rescued from herself; that of a victim to an inherited morbid tendency for which she could hardly be held responsible.

His imagination dwelt upon Varuna's superstitious belief that the new-born year would for weal or woe decide her destiny, and upon Mrs. Featherstone's laughing suggestion of a play in which each of them was to act a more

or less important part. Cazalette, too, stirred his curiosity. Setting aside his presumable connection with the fate of Mrs. Kilsyth and her daughter, there was something in the very appearance of the man—in his mediæval face; in his sweet suavity—tinged also by mystery and reserve; in the subtle sense of intellect and influence with which he impressed the most casual observer—that made him seem a determining power in the faintly outlined drama which now thrilled Warrender's fancy.

Nó, he would not go—not yet. He would remain at least till Helena's arrival.

Thus the dark hours passed on slowly. Daylight found him sleepless and weary. He threw the venetians wide open. The sun was rising upon the first day of the new year. Mists were rolling away, and distant peaks flushing a tender rose. Every breath smelt sweetly. A myriad dew-drops sparkled on every tree and shrub. The hills seemed to

have barely awakened from sleep—their crest clear, but the shadows as of dreamland still lingering upon the olive groves. Monaco lay shrouded in a transparent veil of vapour. A breeze ruffled the Mediterranean, and to the west every wavelet was tipped with gold.

Warrender rose and dressed. Only drowsy servants, and men going forth on early errands, with holiday garments not yet donned, passed him as he made his way along the corridor and through the hotel garden. He wandered into the grounds of the Casino and stood again upon the terrace where Madame Fano had made her strange confession the night before—“*I have never loved.*” He seemed to hear the words as she had uttered them, calm, distinct, and mournful. Spoken by another woman they might have borne no deep significance. From her lips they revealed a mental desert of dreary hopelessness which made him shudder. It was pitiful to reflect that her pulses had never

throbbed to any sweeter or diviner agitation than the feverish excitement of gambling; that her holiest instincts and purest aspirations should be smothered by this growth of baleful thought which could surely only flourish in the corrupt atmosphere she now breathed.

There was in Warrender's nature a certain old-world simplicity and impulse towards knightliness somewhat out of harmony with the age in which he lived. For him, womanhood had a peculiar sanctity; and love, truth, and purity were definite realities, often obscured by modern shams, but still existing. It was his theory that civilisation had tended to debase rather than to elevate the weaker sex. All his chivalry rose in defence or justification of the falsity and frivolity with which women are usually charged. Men and society were in fault, not they, who under ideal conditions should be neither more nor less than wives, mothers, and saints. To reform the world he

would have begun by reforming women. At present, the object of his yearning solicitude, Madame Fano, seemed the one woman to be—not reformed—but restored to her better self.

The gardens were deserted save for a *bonne*, a group of black-eyed, fantastically dressed children—French babies; good heavens! how out of place would the clear-browed, frank-faced English boy or girl appear amid these surroundings!—and a sallow, haggard-eyed gambler of the night before, who sat upon one of the benches in an attitude of dejection, and gave the impression that he was reflecting upon the most convenient mode of committing suicide.

The sun was now considerably above the horizon. The mountains had lost the ethereal hues of early morning, and the sea was a sheet of silver. Warrender strolled round by the terraces, his senses drinking in the beauty and fragrance on all sides of him, and presently

began to skirt the sea, walking along the Condamine road and finally ascending the steep hill which leads to the fortress of Monaco.

He lingered in the quiet streets of the old town, delighting in the contrast they presented to the glittering quarter he had quitted. Now he paused at the point of the promontory and took a view of the narrow thoroughfare he had traversed. His mind was still unconsciously occupied by Madame Fano, and it was with hardly a start of surprise that he beheld the lady herself advancing from the opposite direction.

She did not see him. Her eyes were cast down, her thoughts evidently preoccupied ; she walked with a slow, undulating gait, which in the crowded Casino he had had no opportunity of admiring. In her hands she carried a basket and a bouquet of flowers. When within a few yards of him, she stopped at the closed door of a baker's shop, where the brown twisted loaves

hung on nails on the wall, knocked, and after a moment entered.

He waited in the hope of seeing her emerge, but several minutes elapsed and there was no sign of her reappearance. He turned, half angry with himself for his curiosity. "Why should I play the detective in this fashion?" he murmured, and walked resolutely away, past a little thicket of umbrella pines, whence zig-zag paths led downward from terrace to terrace, each planted with flowering shrubs and beautiful with the luxuriance of semi-tropical vegetation. Here natural situation enhanced all that labour could accomplish: palms waved their feathery plumes, and the bright crimson of geraniums, the blue-green of aloes, and pink of mesembryanthemum stood out vividly against an intensely blue sea. Two or three gnarled olive trees and stone-pines, and an occasional glimpse of rough rockwork overgrown with weeds, gave wildness to the scene and added to the sense

of solitude. Far away were the promontory of Antibes and the distant range of the Esterels ; and on the sea, white sails like gulls were already scudding.

Warrender seated himself upon a semicircular bench turned from the road, and, with a curious feeling of distance and transference of interest, bent his thoughts towards an expedition he was planning in the future for the purpose of studying the flora and fauna of the Southern Archipelago.

He had not been meditating long when the faint rustle of a dress upon the gravel near brought him back to Monte Carlo. Madame Fano was standing close beside him. She looked surprised, but did not hold out her hand as he rose and approached her.

“So you have found out these gardens already,” she said with a smile. “They are a favourite resort of mine, and are far more beautiful than anything at the Casino. I know

every turn, almost every plant. But you have not chosen your seat well. If you like, I will show you my especial nook. It is on a lower terrace and quite screened from the road."

She led the way down a rudely cut flight of steps on to a narrow level, descending by a steep wall straight to the sea, its only parapet a hedge of mingled aloes and geraniums. At one end a kind of grotto had been scooped in the rock; a tiny stream trickled through it and watered banks of moss and fern. Here was a bench upon which Madame Fano seated herself. The cliff against which Warrender leaned formed a sheltering background. At its base were beds of violets in full bloom scenting the air.

"One might imagine oneself a long way from Monte Carlo," said Warrender. "But I did not expect that you would have risen so early, Madame Fano, after your fatigue of last night."

“Oh, after a wakeful night, nothing refreshes one so much as a stroll before the dew has dried up. We must have left the hotel almost together, Mr. Warrender. But I came by the higher road, and I went into the church by the ravine to offer up a new year's prayer for my little girl.”

“I saw you a few minutes ago in the street yonder.”

“At the hunchback baker's, who is quite an interesting person in his way. I must introduce you to him at some future time. I have a weakness for the bread of the country, and very often carry home one of the brown sour twists; and there is a little lame boy there whom it would not do to forget on New Year's day.”

“Madame Fano, I begin to see that Lord Bretland was quite right in what he said of you yesterday evening. You make a jest of benevolence, yet you practise it largely.”

She flushed slightly. "No, I do not jest at benevolence ; it is too rare—that is, when it is purely unselfish. My visit to the lame boy does not deserve the name. I am very fond of children. This is a pleasant spot," she added, as though wishing to change the subject. "One can be as lonely as one pleases here. So few of the crowd from Monte Carlo visit these gardens. I often come to this seat with my book, or with no companion but my thoughts, and spend hours trying to reconcile facts and fancies."

"Successfully ?"

"Need you ask ? Life is a strange problem, Mr. Warrender. That remark is not original, is it ? It has been made once or twice before ; but the truth of it always stands out just as forcibly as ever. One sees such a mass of incongruous elements which cannot by art or nature be made to blend or harmonise. Talk of free will ! There's no such thing. One

fancies sometimes that it would be so easy to wrench oneself away from what is hurtful or degrading or even simply disagreeable, and lead just the kind of life which would develop one's few good qualities; but that is exactly what is impossible."

"Oh, no, Madame Fano," said Warrender earnestly. "It can never be impossible to separate oneself from what is hurtful."

"Yes; it is quite impossible. I know of what you are thinking. As I lay awake last night I thought of your question to me, why I stayed here and played. I wondered what had made me talk to you as unreservedly as I did. I don't remember ever having spoken in the same way to any one before."

"Perhaps," said Warrender impetuously, "you had a fancy that I might help you. I beg your pardon," he added. "That was a presumptuous sort of thing to say."

There was no rebuke in her look ; rather, a faint gleam of satisfaction.

“I am glad that you said it. If there were any presumptuousness it would lie in my having had such a fancy. Yet it was just what I did feel. I am very candid, but there is an answering candour about you, Mr. Warrender, which makes me think that it would be quite possible to apply to you if I were in need.”

“I wish that you would act upon that feeling ; and you would see——” He paused.

“See what ?”

“I don't suppose that I could really help you, but at least my best faculties would be strained in the attempt.”

She was silent for a moment, then she said deliberately : “But I am not in need—not, that is, in any definite sense.”

“There is an indefinite kind of want which is harder to bear than material trouble—the

need of sympathy and fellowship ; of faith in oneself and in the goodness of others ; of an object upon which to concentrate one's thoughts and interests."

"You think that I have all these wants—that I am unhappy?"

"I have no right to judge, but your words and looks make me fancy so."

She stooped and gathered a little bunch of violets, with which she played while she answered him.

"But I have an object in life—several. In the first place, I am of use to my mother. Nothing would induce her to leave Monte Carlo ; and I am at least able to restrain her from some extravagances. Then, to a certain extent, I have inherited her temperament. I am more self-controlled, more calculating, less warm-hearted, but in essentials we are alike. I have a passion for play. It's the same sort of fascination as that which danger has for

some natures. You could not understand the fever of excitement which took possession of me last night when you were winning. I don't know what made me stop you. But a feeling came over me all in a moment—of shame, hatred, and horror—horror of the future.”

She had been looking away from him, and now, with a startled glance that seemed to behold a phantom in his solicitude, met his eyes, which were fastened upon her face in sad inquiry. She laughed nervously.

“My talk is very melodramatic—quite in keeping with the moral atmosphere of Monte Carlo.”

“Oh pray go on—if you will trust me. Any trouble or dread of that kind is best spoken of.”

“It is not an unreasonable dread, as you would admit if you knew the whole history of my family, and understood me as well as I

understand myself. Oh, no; I am wrong to say that. I do not understand myself. I think self-analysis is my bane. If I could only live in the present, if I hadn't a dreary and perpetual sense of dissatisfaction with my life, I might perhaps escape from the horror which haunts me. I try to keep the spectre at bay, but it looks out at me from my own face and from the faces of my friends. I see myself as I may be years hence—one of those horrible hags whom you may have noticed at the tables—a more pitiable object than they—with the curse of insanity upon me."

She rose abruptly and moved to the edge of the terrace, where she stood with pale cheeks, lips compressed, and brooding eyes fixed seaward. He followed her, his face, too, white from repressed excitement.

"You must not say that!" he exclaimed agitatedly. "It is not true. You must not; it hurts me to hear you."

She turned towards him, and the eyes of each seemed to be searching into the soul of the other.

“I see that you are in earnest!” she said. “You must love Helena very dearly to feel so deep an interest in her half-sister—a woman whom you have only known for a few hours.”

Her words thrilled Warrender painfully. He would have found it impossible to analyse the sensation, had he tried to do so, but was quite aware that it was a disagreeable one. An eager disclaimer rose involuntarily to his lips, and was checked by embarrassing consciousness. Madame Fano seemed to guess at the cause of his confusion, and said with a smile which was also tinged with melancholy :

“The obvious answer to that remark would be, I suppose, that I am a person who must under any circumstances inspire interest. But do not, I beseech you, talk to me with that conventional sort of gallantry which your sex

practises so largely. There are so many men ready to swear away their lives at my feet—absolutely not one whom I can call friend. My sister's lover might fill a place which my own lover could never fill. Your frankness last night about your feeling for Helena seems to place our relations towards each other upon such a safe footing ; and notwithstanding all you may have heard about me here, it is quite true that I find great comfort in that certainty."

This speech, in which there was without doubt no underlying emotion, grated curiously upon Warrender. He answered hastily : " You spoke just now of the objects which you had in life. It was absurd in me to fancy for a moment that I could help you. I am weak too—if you are weak—and tossed by every wave of feeling. My position is more lonely than yours, and I stand at a disadvantage—a great one for a man. I don't know much about society or the world—your world—or in what direction lies the

special need for sympathy, of the people who live in it. I am adrift, with all my experience to learn—and no friends. You have—acquaintances shall we say—who at least wish to devote themselves to you. You have your mother—and your child.”

“Is my experience of life greater than yours? Yes, perhaps, of the evil of it, the sort of evil that belongs to an unwholesome moral atmosphere, and comes from gas, glitter, strained emotions—everything that is false and artificial. I long sometimes to rush away and try to get into bracing air. That kind of knowledge only saddens and embitters. Don't let us compare our lives, Mr. Warrender. It is quite enough that they are both unsatisfactory: mine from within; yours from without. But you will not be unhappy for long. Even if you never get what you long for, you have within yourself a stronghold against badness and sorrow. The past and future

are not horrors at which you dare not glance."

Her voice broke slightly. He saw her eyes grow larger and softer with unshed tears. His heart rose in struggling entreaty and protest. At that moment a step sounded upon the rocky stair. Both looked round. The shadow thrown upon the cliff revealed the intruder before he himself became visible. It was Cazalette.

Madame Fano moved a few steps uncertainly, as if in doubt whether to advance or retreat. The softness died from her face. She flung away the bunch of violets with which she had been nervously toying, as though in the action she would have thrown off the mood which had prompted her self-betraying words. Once more she became the stately woman of the world, cold, weary, inscrutable.

Cazalette stepped forward, his suave impassive countenance giving no indication of surprise or

consciousness that he had disturbed a private conversation.

He bowed over the hand Madame Fano offered him; and in a few well-chosen words made something more than the conventional speech of New Year's congratulation. Varuna coldly uttered her thanks and returned the greeting.

"It is five years to-day, madame," continued Cazalette, "since upon this very spot I had the honour of wishing you happiness, prosperity, and—farewell. I did not expect the good fortune of seeing you here this morning."

"For that you must thank Mr. Warrender," replied Varuna—"if it be a question of thanks. I was going home, when I saw him, as I passed, seated upon the most uncomfortable bench in the gardens. He looked as though he wanted to enjoy his thoughts in solitude; it was an act of charity to show him where he might do so happily. Now, having earned his gratitude, I will ask you, Colonel Cazalette, to call me a

carriage if you can see one passing, for I don't feel equal to the long walk in the heat."

"Willingly," said Cazalette. "Mr. Warrender, shall I disturb your meditations if, after a short stroll round the castle, I come back and smoke a cigarette in your company? In my American wanderings I met one or two men who knew you well; and I was much interested in what I heard of your discoveries. It won't bore you, will it, to have a little chat presently?"

Warrender felt an unreasonable desire to excuse himself, but good breeding and a sense of guilt forbade the inclination; and he assured Colonel Cazalette of the pleasure which he should derive from his company.

"You are wise to drive home," said Cazalette turning to Madame Fano. "I have already seen Mrs. Kilsyth, who begged me, if I met you, to give you a reminder that there is to be an excursion this afternoon; in which," he

added, "I have been honoured by an invitation to accompany you."

"Ah!" said Varuna; "that recalls to my mind a note for you, Mr. Warrender, which I have in my pocket, and which was to have been given to the concierge this morning. It is only to ask if you will join us in our expedition. We are going to make gipsy tea at Cape Martin. The Casino is closed to-day, and we are people without an occupation."

Warrender accepted the invitation with an eagerness which he regretted when he perceived the curious expression which flitted across Cazalette's face.

"Good-bye then for the present," said Varuna. "You will join us in our *salon* at three o'clock?"

CHAPTER XIII.

QUART POT TEA.

MADAME FANO was alone in her *salon* when Warrender was announced. The room was charming, and had an air of occupation and long residence not common to the ordinary hotel sitting-rooms. He made some remark to this effect.

“Yes, we brought a few things with us, and have contrived to give it a homelike look,” she answered. “The drains at our villa are being overhauled, but I hope that we shall be settled there again before my sister arrives.”

“When do you expect Miss Kilsyth?” asked Warrender.

“It is not quite certain. I think in about ten days or a fortnight. Thus, Mr. Warrender,” she added with an effort at playfulness, “if Cannes or Nice have any attractions for you, I advise you to visit them at once and return here later.”

“No,” he replied. “In that case, I should remain here for the next fortnight and then go to Cannes or Nice.”

“I think you are wrong,” she said gently. “But there is time enough for you to change your mind.”

“You play and sing?” he said, abruptly indicating the open piano. “Of course—I heard you last night.”

“Yes, but very seldom. My mother sings charmingly, even still, and has been practising this morning. But I can’t be contented with a thing done in amateur fashion; and to do anything else means consecrating one’s life to what perhaps is not worth it. I always want

the full taste of everything. I am afraid that I have no capacity of getting interested in a study or pursuit. And I cannot give expression to the thoughts struggling within me in music. I only lose myself, in that way, when I am listening to the violin or to an organ."

"You draw or paint, perhaps?"

"No; I tried once—but it doesn't satisfy me."

"Then you read?"

"What a catechism! And I am obliged to make the humiliating confession that books have not a great charm for me. When I was a girl I used to be very fond of reading, but as soon as I began to *live* myself, the taste left me. Science and positive facts seemed too immense to grapple with. A human heartbreak is of more consequence than the sun's component parts. You don't think so; well, it appears so to me. I'd rather be helped by the honestly told experience of one human soul, than by all the facts and

theories in the universe, and all the books that were ever written."

She moved to the window and stood, drawing on her long gloves, gazing out upon the western sky. She wore a closely fitting mantle bordered with sable. A little fur cap set upon her abundant hair, and a cluster of tea roses fastened at her throat, gave her a coquettish air quite at variance with her morning's aspect.

"The day has become overcast," she said. "It is almost a relief after the overpowering glare. I sometimes wish for the subdued tones and grey skies which I remember in England. One wearies of this vivid Riviera colouring."

"You have not been in England for a long time?"

"Not since my stepfather's death eleven years ago. I was only seventeen when I left it. There, Mr. Warrender, I have told you a secret which most women would guard jealously. That is a simple sum in addition, and the product

will give you my age. But there are social philosophers who maintain that a woman is in the zenith of her charms at thirty."

"At any rate," said Mrs. Kilsyth, entering, "no woman ever gets beyond that age as long as she has a shred of good looks remaining. Haven't you observed that every frisky matron one meets was married at sixteen? Don't you admire our flowers, Mr. Warrender? Two of these bouquets arrived from Paris this morning."

"And this one?" asked Warrender, pointing to a magnificent floral trophy that completely covered the small table which supported it.

"Oh, that! From Nice, I imagine. It was Colonel Cazalette's New Year's gift to me. Those full-blown camellias are very appropriate to my mature charms. Now there's a sentiment about his little offering to Varuna which suggests quite a different idea."

She stretched her hand towards a quaintly-shaped vase of old Venetian glass, in which

were loosely placed a mass of yellow roses drooping upon their stems ; then, rebuked by her daughter's glance, rattled on :

“Come ; I hear the bells of Mrs. Featherstone's ponies jingling. There is the inevitable Lord Bretland pursuing his system of education. General Featherstone, tacked on to our new drawing-room *prima-donna*, Miss Violet Rochford, and provided with a *motif*, is happily bent upon self-improvement also. Now we are going to be truly arcadian—music and sentiment ; tea under the pines ; wild flowers, singing birds, and all the rest of it ; only, unfortunately, there are no birds hereabouts, they've substituted Cupids instead.”

Mrs. Kilsyth was in her most light-hearted vein. When Colonel Cazalette appeared she welcomed him with cordiality, greeting him in an informal way, which suggested that they had met before that day, and thanking him prettily for his attention. There remained no trace of

the confusion, almost alarm, which she had exhibited upon his arrival the night before. If there had been any doubt in the mind of either as to their attitude towards each other, they had evidently arrived at an understanding, and the only signs of anxiety which Mrs. Kilsyth displayed were an occasional furtive glance directed towards his face, and a nervous start which she now and then gave when he addressed her suddenly.

Conversation flowed freely as the open landau in which these four were seated, bowled swiftly along the pretty sea-girt road towards Mentone. Its burden was sustained chiefly by Cazalette, who discoursed with the fluency of a travelled, well educated man bent upon making himself agreeable. Mrs. Kilsyth's questions were numerous, and her chatter might have been likened to that of an elderly, cultivated parrot; she seemed uneasy when a moment's silence fell upon the group. Madame Fano spoke little,

and it must be owned that Warrender appeared at first to no great advantage, yet even he, stimulated by the elder man's tact in drawing forth his resources, and by a faint gleam of animation upon Varuna's face when he pointedly addressed her, made amends towards the close of the drive for his taciturnity at its commencement.

It was perhaps natural that Warrender's mind should have already begun to exercise itself in speculations concerning Cazalette's motives, antecedents, and possible interest in Madame Fano. Cazalette's manner to her was at once distant and deferential, and he addressed her but seldom. Yet Warrender fancied that he detected in sundry looks and gestures the evidence of a warm regard.

No prejudice could declare Cazalette to be an adventurer in the vulgar sense of the term. His whole bearing was that of a gentleman far removed from vicious or Bohemian proclivities.

He trod upon undebateable ground. His careless allusions to affairs and to persons of note, living and deceased, showed familiarity with the politics and social life of a somewhat earlier date. He belonged to the world, yet seemed apart from it. He did not play, yet had apparently frequented the various gaming places in Europe. Of his poverty he spoke without affectation. His manner had something of the cynicism and sadness of a recluse, and was faintly tinged by sacerdotalism ; one involuntarily connected him with the Catholic Church. Of art he showed considerable knowledge ; he seemed well read, and his speech was at times almost poetic.

As the carriage turned into the olive-shaded road which led to the cape, Warrender pulled his thoughts together and rebuked himself for having indulged in romantic conjecture.

“What a fool I am,” he muttered, “to imagine the first well-mannered foreigner I meet, a Jesuit in disguise.”

It was at this point that he exerted himself to join in the conversation, and succeeded so far as to banish, for the present, sinister insinuations.

A spirit of harmony seemed now to have crept over the quartette. Mrs. Kilsyth's eyes no longer wandered uneasily from Cazalette to her daughter, and Madame Fano leaned back against the cushions, her former erect attitude replaced by one pliant and unconstrained, her face, if pensive, full of sweetness. Warrender's vague distrust and painful expectation of harrowing discovery had melted into a dream-like sense of well-being. But for that subtle element which Mrs. Featherstone had described as a suggestion of tragedy in the background, the drive would have been to him a commonplace incident, and his companions charming worldlings unswayed by any more complex influences than the pastime of the hour, and the ordinary interests of that butterfly society of which they formed part.

The carriage drew up at the end of the point. Here breakers were roaring against a fringe of jagged white rocks which terminated the cape. Foam dashed over the low undergrowth of lentiscus and myrtle. The sea stretched grey and hazy to the horizon, and a veiled sun shed a track of misty brightness across the bay. Monte Carlo lay like a jewel — in the curve, the craggy heights behind it, and the tower of La Turbie defined clearly against the sky. To the east, Mentone and the promontories of Italy lay slumberous. There was brooding and faint melancholy in the air. From the sea shore a rocky path led to a forest of pines, wind-swept into fantastic shapes, where the atmosphere was pungent with a resinous odour, and the rosemary grew high. Here, in a sheltered nook, the rest of the party had already arranged themselves. A hamper half unpacked lay upon the grass, and Mrs. Featherstone, clad in a becoming tailor-made

costume, was on her knees coaxing a refractory wood fire into a blaze.

“Now,” she exclaimed, rising, with her pretty face all rosy after her exertions, “just by way of contrast and as a sort of tribute to those lanky gum-trees you all admire so much, I’m going to relapse for a short time into my original condition of barbarism. I can’t make a damper, Mr. Warrender, for I don’t suppose there is a sheet of bark handy; but for once in your lives you shall all drink quart pot tea. The taste is, like other things, indigenous to the soil, so I shall not expect you to be enthusiastic in your appreciation. Lord Bretland, you are out of office for the present, but you may make yourself useful if you please. Where are the implements?”

Lord Bretland rummaged in the hamper and produced a bright tin can, which he held at arms-length.

“I am instructed to inform the company

that this is a—*billy*,” he observed in his melancholy drawl.

“No, indeed !” energetically cried Mrs. Featherstone ; “no such thing. It is merely a vulgar Birmingham imitation. A *billy* should be smoked black ; it should be saturated with rank tea, battered, dented, and generally disreputable, with an odour of grass-tree tops, bandicoots, and black fellows, mingled with the delicate aroma of store tobacco. Well”—mournfully—“one can’t have everything in this world. Fill it with water and put it on the fire.”

Lord Bretland obeyed, then brought forth two utensils resembling half-quartern measures, and a dozen tin mugs strung together by the handles.

“And these,” he continued in the same tone, “are quart pots and pannikins, commonly used by the stockmen and aborigines in Australia : while this”—exhibiting a brown

caky substance which looked like burnt toffee —“is the nearest approach procurable in Monte Carlo to what Mrs. Featherstone calls *ration sugar*, a commodity practically unknown in this hemisphere.”

“I can’t compliment you upon being a very efficient assistant,” retorted that lady with a little grimace. “Evidently your sphere lies yonder—in the gilded haunts of civilisation. My word! Lord Bretland—to fall back upon the phraseology of my youth—I’d like to see you bushed in a mallee scrub. There! I will have nothing more to do with you. Come, Mr. Warrender, it isn’t the first time you and I have stood together by a camp fire. Be ready to throw in the tea and sugar and to stir up with a bit of stick as soon as the water boils.”

Warrender, lending himself to the humour of the moment, did as he was bidden; and all stood round, intently gazing, while the operation

was conducted with a solemnity befitting the incantations of a witch. The flame mounted, the fir cones crackled; the critical instant arrived. Warrender added first the tea, then the sugar, while Mrs. Featherstone stirred vigorously with a crooked stick; finally the decoction was delivered to Lord Bretland, who with great gravity poured it from one quart pot to another till commanded by Mrs. Featherstone to desist. The beverage was then declared ready for drinking and handed round in pannikins. Each guest drank, made a wry face, and called variously for sherry and seltzer, and cream.

“Oh, I say, Mrs. F-f-f-featherstone,” stuttered Captain Bland, who had attached himself to the party, “isn’t this all ch-ch-chaff? You don’t mean that you d-d-drink that stuff in Australia?”

“Never anything else,” rejoined she imperturbably. “It is supposed to have an effect upon the brain, Captain Bland. That’s what

makes all us Australians so sharp. Now, you may have some egg sandwiches, if you like, to take the taste out of your mouth."

The gipsy tea was on the whole a success. Mrs. Featherstone had at all events the knack of putting every one on good terms with himself or herself, and if she was audacious, it was a pleasant audacity. Some one started singing catches, and the voices sounded sweetly among the pines and mingled with the monotonous swash of the sea. Then Mr. Braunstein, appealing to Miss Rochford, suggested a German part-song, which was followed by the "Lorelei" with Heine's words.

"Ah," murmured Mrs. Kilsyth, "I prefer the Hans Breitmann version of 'Die Mädchen mit nodings on.' It harmonises better with the company and the quart pot tea."

Like all such impromptu concerts, this one descended by slow gradations to the music-hall level.

There is a fascination in shrieking upon a foreign shore a comic breakdown or "Rule Britannia" which the typical cockney cannot resist, certainly not Captain Bland, whose announcement in a piping falsetto, that Britons "never, never, ne-ever would be slaves," was effusively echoed by the more patriotic and less highly cultivated of the little assemblage.

"There's a good deal of freedom about that chorus," observed Mrs. Kilsyth to Colonel Cazalette. He had stationed himself beside her, though his eyes were fixed upon Varuna and Warrender, who were standing together a little distance apart from the rest. "Could any set of people but the English make themselves so supremely ridiculous? 'Rule Britannia' always reminds me of a cock crowing down a nightingale. No; Captain Bland, don't ask me to join you. I'm not a Briton—I'm only a woman."

"*Only a woman*," murmured Mr. Braunstein in a tone of deep meaning.

“All nationalities are alike to me,” continued Mrs. Kilsyth. “I’m above prejudices. I’d even go so far as to hail a chimpanzee as man and brother. I hate your ‘nice little, tight little island’ cant; the self-laudation and hypocrisy; the straight walk along the narrow road, elbows out, and no grace for a sinner, the breakfast at nine, the luncheon at one, the dinner at seven—ugh! Am I hurting any one’s sensibilities? Isn’t that Mrs. Livingstone, with the association of wool workers from the *Nationale* at Mentone, rounding the point? To your tents, oh, Israel; the Philistines are upon us!”

“Come this way,” whispered Colonel Cazalette with gentle imperativeness. “I want to talk to you.”

The appearance of Mrs. Livingstone and her cohort was the signal for a general dispersion. In such case the laws of natural attraction decide the pairing of a company of both sexes. Warrender and Varuna, forsaking the great pine

grove, bent their steps towards the wind-swept cape. It was a rough way, and their hands frequently touched as he guided her over the shingle. At last, she seated herself upon a granite boulder, below which the water lay in miniature pools, and tangled masses of seaweed had gathered in mounds of shiny greenish brown. The wind blew in, salt and exhilarating but touched with chill. It stirred Varuna's furs and loosened the bunch of roses at her throat; they fell and were borne by the breeze over the rocks. Warrender would have rescued them, but she interposed:

"Never mind; they have done their duty, and I have more at home." After a pause she asked, without looking towards her companion, "What do you think of Colonel Cazalette?"

Warrender hesitated. "It is a difficult question. He is the sort of man about whom it would be impossible to form an opinion after a few hours' acquaintance."

"I don't agree with you. He has a distinct individuality. The only people worth thinking about are those who affect one definitely at first sight."

"He certainly does that."

"And he impressed you last night—disagreeably?"

"Since you insist upon frankness, my first feeling was that I should be sorry to trust him."

"You were right," she replied gravely. "Don't trust him."

"Yet you seem to have known Colonel Cazalette intimately, Madame Fano."

"I saw a great deal of him five or six years ago. He had a strong influence over my mother and was a sort of lay confessor to her when she was in one of her transition states of belief. I am not speaking heartlessly, Mr. Warrender. You must see that my mother is impulsive, changeable—and lovable as a child.

As regards myself, Colonel Cazalette is associated in my memory with painful events. Now," she said in a different tone, "you will tell me something more about my sister Helena. Is it a pleasure to you, or the reverse, talking of her?"

Warrender winced at the question. "I am glad to talk of her, Madame Fano, if you are interested—but——"

"Yes, I think that I understand. I have fancied that the mention of her name jarred-upon you. If I seem wanting in perception you must recollect that I am reading an unfamiliar language. I am sure that you are too sincere and direct to shrink because of self-love or wounded vanity. It seems to me that a true man, having once loved a woman, must, whatever happens, hold her in tender remembrance. You would be surprised if you could know how much I have been thinking of you and Helena this afternoon."

"You are deeply attached to your sister?"

“That is perhaps putting it too strongly. I know so little of her. She was a child when I left England—a thin, quiet little thing with long fair hair, earnest eyes, a solemn way with her, and a most extraordinary faculty for adoration. She was just the sort of child whom as a woman one would expect to sacrifice herself for a creed, an idea, a sentiment. I can’t imagine her an ordinary flesh-and-blood girl of the period. There’s a tone in her letters not of the earth, earthy. I dare say that she is weak; all creatures of beliefs are so. Am I right?”

“I had no reason to think her weak,” replied Warrender, a little bitterly; “at all events, she did not believe in me. What should you like to know about her, Madame Fano? She is tall and slender now, with a sort of girlish stateliness that is rather difficult to describe. She has deep dark eyes, and is not much given to laughter. I used to think that her views of life were too serious, and that she thought too

much of others. But before long you will be able to judge for yourself."

"I have never known what it is to have a woman friend," said Varuna as though excusing her interest; "and Helena is my half-sister—except my mother and my little girl, nearer to me than any one in the world. Hers will be a new influence in my life, perhaps a happy one. If, as her letters seem to say, she believes in me, loves me, thinks only good of me, there would be a motive for sacrifice—for endeavour——" She paused. Warrender did not immediately reply. "You think me very self-absorbed?" said Varuna, looking at him directly. "You are right; egoism is the curse of a nature like mine. My interest in Helena merely takes the form of speculation as to how she will affect me."

"No," said Warrender nervously. "I haven't thought much of such things; but it seems to me that finely strung natures must always be

more or less egoistic. It is a question of nerves, and of the capability of receiving vivid impressions. But why do you speak so drearily? You have surely the strongest motive to effort in life—your child.”

Madame Fano’s face was darkened by an expression of deep sadness, but a moment later there passed over her features a curious gleam of tenderness softening their fixity.

“That in which one’s existence is bound is not merely a motive,” she answered in a low voice. “Had you a fancy that I did not care for my little girl? Well, perhaps my manner justified the thought. Mr. Warrender, I have sometimes wished, prayed that my child might die. The maimed speech, the cramped intelligence, the dumb eyes, are living reproaches to me for a wrong unconsciously committed—reminders of an injury which I can never forget or forgive. What right have people”—her voice vibrated with passionate earnestness—

“to weight other lives with all that is bad in themselves—and worse—worse? I can’t explain myself, and it is impossible for you to understand.”

“I do understand.” His eyes bright with indignant pity met hers. “The suffering which is brought upon the innocent is the saddest problem in life.”

“It can’t be altered or made better. There’s a sort of poison in such sorrow,” she said.

“No, it can’t be altered, or healed quite, on this side of the grave.”

“But you think,” she said eagerly, “that there might be a way of escaping from the hopelessness—the dreariness?”

“For you?” he asked simply. “Oh yes, yes. You are so young still, Madame Fano—too young to be crushed, too good and true to become hard and cynical. Give up this false, artificial life, and go and live with your child. You don’t know what there may be for you in

the future. There will be peace ; there may be love."

Varuna's face showed no hardness or indifference now. She seemed to hang upon his words as though they were prophetic. Her eyes were clear and dilated ; her lips trembled. She was quite silent for a minute ; then she said falteringly :

"But you don't know. You have not realised. My little girl is almost an idiot. She is deaf and dumb. They said—they said that it was because I had been unhappy. I had suffered—I can't speak of it. Don't ask me any questions. You see that hope is taken from me."

There was a painful pause ; and then—

"You said," urged Warrender gently, "that after this year you would play no more."

"I mean to give it up," she answered, "if the passion is not too strong for me. I don't know if I can live without excitement of some

kind. I was quite in earnest about my superstitious belief that this year will decide my fate. And now you make me almost hope that there may be brightness in store for me. Mr. Warrender, you must not judge me by the standard you would apply to a gently brought up English girl. I have lived my life. I am disillusioned, and the taste of ashes is between my lips. Every woman who is without the true sense of happiness craves for a means of escape from the vapid flatness of existence. Some women find it in dress, gaiety, and flirtation. These have no charms for me, and surely do not demoralise less than *roulette*. And I have justified gambling to myself. You know that I was poor, and that my mother's income only lasts during her life. I wished to win money so that I might be independent, and thus provide for my little girl's future. I have won nearly enough—not quite. Come," she added, rising, "we

have talked a long time. Let us join the rest."

"You are not displeased with me," said Warrender, in a beseeching tone. "I know that I have no right to speak to you in this way."

"Yes; you have a certain right," she replied with an air of forced playfulness. "You are going some day to marry my sister. That is a reason why we should be frank with each other."

The red mounted to Warrender's brow.

"I had rather," he said slowly, "that you would leave your sister out of the question, and give me the right on different grounds."

"How?" she asked.

"It would be the greatest pleasure to me to feel that you trusted me, and that I might consider myself your friend apart from the possibility of any nearer bond."

"I do trust you. Concerning my friendship,

I think that, with an impulsiveness which is not usual with me, I offered it to you the first evening we met. As for the other possibility, we will talk of it no more—till Helena comes.”

CHAPTER XIV.

TRANSITION.

“ If thy heart, waking in the depths of night,
Quivers and sinks
As on thy lips thou feelst a breath,
A breath of flame,
Know that unseen beside thee
'Tis I that breathe.”

THIS conversation on the beach at Cape Martin seemed to establish a crisis in the relations of Warrender and Madame Fano. The slight mutual embarrassment, impulsive appeal on her part and earnestness of response on his, marking their first approaches to intimacy, were merged now in an unconstrained intercourse, that allowed much to be taken for granted, and in which it was difficult to draw

the line between what was actually said and what was tacitly understood.

Both were deeply conscious of the influence each exercised over the other, yet neither quite ventured to analyse it. That dreamy sense of diffusiveness and mental communion ; the vague longings and unrest, half sweet, half sad ; the involuntary turning of mind to mind, and the constant desire to share a hundred poetic fancies which haunted the imagination of both—all these indications of dawning regard were recognised by Varuna, and, if framed in thought, were attributed to the newly-forged chain of sympathy that connected herself, Helena and the new-comer. It is sometimes hard to separate cause and effect ; and in this case Varuna was at a loss to discover whether her increased interest in Helena had been inspired by the meeting with Warrender, or whether the latter had gained importance in her eyes through his relations with her half-sister.

She found herself frequently marvelling at Helena's rejection of this man, who seemed to her, of all she had ever met, the one to whom a woman might in greatest security confide herself. An almost fierce desire seized her to plead his cause, to tear away the spider-webs of religious prejudice, which she felt convinced fettered Helena's will. She longed that he should be happy. Life was so troubled, the desires of men so low, their fancies so brief, it seemed cruel that the fervour of this heart should spend itself and be wasted. Her own heart throbbed in pity. Poor Varuna! Love had hitherto only exhibited himself to her in shapes which had provoked her scorn, and had almost made her exult in the suffering she inflicted. She had fancied that this insensibility arose from her own shallowness and falsity; now it came upon her like a revelation that she alone had been true, and that it was the truth in Warrender's soul, meeting hers, which forced

her into such passionate sympathy with his deeper feelings. She had never before been brought into contact with this large-souled, simple, chivalrous type. Here was no posing for effect, no encouragement of morbid sentiment, no paltry vanity lowering god-like love to its own earthly level. Warrender's mien expressed a quiet sadness which touched Varuna more deeply than the most despairing exhibition of melancholy.

"Why should I be sorry?" she asked herself in her more cynical moods. "If he were *my* lover, I should be as impatient of his love as I am of *their* sighs and reproaches."

But he was not her lover, nor ever could be, seeing that he loved her half-sister. This fact she impressed upon her mind with unnecessary force, possibly from the secret conviction that in it lay her sense of safety, and the justification of her impulsive reliance upon him.

It may have been as Varuna asserted, that she possessed an instinct transcending the limitations of ordinary human intelligence, and enabling her to catch dim glimpses of shadows thrown by the future. Certain it was, that Warrender's appearance upon the eve of that year which had been foretold to her as fateful, the link between him and Helena, and the strange coincidence of the latter's expected arrival at Monte Carlo, stirred her imagination, chimed with her superstitious fancies, and predisposed her to connect him with the threads of her destiny. Her mental attitude towards him was of a kind which she could not have conceived it possible that she should assume towards any man. She, in whom a wretched marriage seemed to have dried up every fount of feeling, who had scoffed at herself as hard and mercenary, and to whom coldness had been as a shield, alike against insult and honestly proffered love, now re-

sembled a half-awakened girl, in her impulsive confidences, her strange fits of dreaminess, her unhesitating trust in him, and the fearlessness with which she accepted this new element in her life, wondering only why, since friendship was so sweet, so much eloquence should be expended upon the intoxicating delights of love.

Another welcome change in her temperament she attributed to his influence. She had hinted to him of morbid terrors, mental horrors, a sense of isolation, which made her at times fancy herself an automaton, wound up to smile and act, while the real disembodied spirit looked on as it were in loathing of this travesty of life. These feelings, which frequently overpowered her in such a manner as almost to justify her dread of losing self-control, and to which the only alternative seemed to lie in the excitement of play, had, since the new year began, almost entirely left her. The sense of a burden lifted was inexpressibly sweet: it was a foretaste of what

existence might be to the pure, untroubled, loved—to such a woman as Helena. At night when she awoke, dreading the cold perspiration and ghastly shrinking from unseen presences, which had made the darkness a torment, she was surprised to find herself composed and trustful, as though a mother's hand clasped hers. She would turn upon her pillow to meet in fancy the gaze of Warrender's eyes, and then close her own again, her whole being pervaded by a conviction of safety and peace.

Warrender was undergoing a somewhat similar phase of experience. From his soul also a trouble had been lifted; for him, too, life now held a new and absorbing interest. He would have been shocked and revolted by the suggestion that his love for Helena was in process of transference to her sister: yet certain it was that the largest share of his thoughts was given to Varuna. What man could withstand the fascination of her variable manner, the homage

conveyed by her reliance upon his opinions, the frank submission of one so beautiful, so complex, and to others so unapproachable. There was a grand simplicity in Varuna's subservience, an unconsciousness and innocence, at total variance with the character she had acquired. No coquette could have played the part without loss of dignity, but her frankness compelled the most absolute respect, and even Mrs. Featherstone's banter was silenced by the grave directness of Madame Fano's reply, when challenged as the heroine of that Monte Carlo drama upon which the pretty Australian still laughingly insisted.

"I see no indications of a drama at present, Mrs. Featherstone. Your imagination must supply the harrowing complications and violent emotions which one connects with the idea of tragedy. Cast your play without me. I am too indifferent to act the heroine."

"Then," observed Mrs. Featherstone, "I shall

certainly practise indifference, since it succeeds so well. There is nothing I adore more than being talked about ! But for that, several things are necessary. One must be tall, and one must have a manner which piques curiosity."

Colonel Cazalette turned to Madame Fano. They were loitering in the vestibule of the Casino, waiting for the rest of the party.

"Do you observe," he asked in a low tone, "that I make an effort to cultivate indifference ?"

"You succeed very well," she replied.

"I am a good actor. But you know me well enough not to need assuring that I neither change nor forget. For me, a passion once felt is the passion of a lifetime."

"I can hardly imagine that you are sincere," she answered pointedly. "You seem to amuse yourself very well."

As she spoke, her eyes turned significantly towards a dark-eyed, slightly-rouged, and

extremely well-dressed woman—evidently one of the fallen angels to whom Monte Carlo is a pleasant abode; and who, with her unfurled crimson fan coquettishly shielding the lower part of her face, was leaning against a pillar, her audacious gaze fixed upon Cazalette.

He flushed slightly and drew Madame Fano aside to a settee placed under the shelter of a stand of ferns.

“Sit here, and be merciful. You are right, and your rebuke gives me more pleasure than pain, for it tells me that you are not absolutely indifferent. But you are a woman of the world, and know——”

“Oh yes, I know, I know,” she interrupted. “I knew all this long ago. Do not suppose that I made the allusion because of any deep interest in you. Only, it is not worth while trying to make me think you different to what you are. You might perhaps impose upon one more innocent. I am hardened and world-

worn. I can hardly believe in goodness, when I see it."

"Do you ever see it?"

Varuna did not answer.

"Whatever my faults," he exclaimed passionately, "you must at least be aware that I have never loved—never can love any woman but you."

"The old story, and it is five years since you last repeated it. I thought that after so long a time it would have been forgotten."

"That story will never be forgotten while I have breath. Say that you believe this."

"It does not matter what I think."

"No; it does not matter. I have given up hope, and you cannot accuse me of having troubled you, since my return, by any obtrusive display of my feelings. I accepted my fate on New Year's morning in the gardens at Monaco. Your heart belongs to this Englishman. I saw then that you were conquered—you—the

edelweiss, the most inaccessible of women, to love whom meant despair and ruin."

"You are utterly mistaken!" she exclaimed vehemently, though in a voice hardly above a whisper. "There is nothing of that kind between Mr. Warrender and me. He wishes to marry my sister."

A peculiar smile curved Cazalette's lips. "He will not marry your sister."

At that moment Lord Bretland appeared. "A thousand apologies, Madame Fano. You have been waiting for your tickets. Here are the wraps. Mrs. Kilsyth has had one of her inspirations, happily while I was at hand to act as agent and stake the napoleons. The number came up and we all are considerably elated. Warrender, I hear, has been winning heavily for you. When is his luck going to turn? It is simply marvellous."

"His luck will last just as long as Madame Fano's indifference," said Mrs. Featherstone, who

had overheard the last remark. "That is the philosophy of gambling and of life."

Thus the threads of destiny crossed and recrossed, and life proceeded merrily in the little principality.

Helena's journey had been delayed. Three weeks had gone by and the Monte Carlo season was at its height. Yachts with pennons flying lay at anchor in the harbour. The terraces and gambling-rooms were crowded with fashionable English. Celebrities of all nations jostled each other in the vestibule. Patti warbled in the theatre. Two or three scions of royalty drove over daily from Nice; and the demi-monde overflowed the Hôtel de Paris. At the Hôtel des Anges every corner was occupied. General Featherstone had departed with his violin and his scores to complete his opera in the comparative seclusion of San Remo, and his pretty wife was still exploring the mysteries of civilisation under the superintendence of Lord

Bretland, and the immediate guidance of several lately-arrived London admirers.

Cazalette remained in his first quarters, but he was a constant visitor at the Villa Kilsyth. He avoided Varuna, but daily his ascendancy over Mrs. Kilsyth became more marked. That lady was not in her usual spirits. She looked worn and ill at ease. Her eyes wandered nervously, her lips were rarely closed; and the inconsequence of her speech, and her fits of alternate excitement and depression, suggested indulgence in morphia or in stimulant of another kind. She went regularly to mass, talked of dreams, auguries, indulged in a thousand superstitions, offered up an unlimited number of candles, and extended the mortification of her gambling instincts to abstinence on Fridays as well as on saints' days.

The most marked change was visible in Varuna. Her face had softened; a tremulous sensibility showed itself on her lips and in her

eyes. Her manner was more gracious, more unconstrained, at times it was almost joyous. She took delight in the beauty around her. Nature seemed to speak to her with a caressing voice. Life presented more healthy interests. It was as though a hideous spectre had been removed from her gaze. She lent herself with animation, too, to the various plans for amusement—drives, *fêtes*, and excursions—organised by the new English visitors, for as the season went on, acquaintances gathered thickly round them.

Madame Fano was at this time one of the most conspicuous figures at Monte Carlo. A Russian magnate was at her feet, and she was surrounded by a throng of admirers. To stake her coins at *roulette* was an eagerly coveted privilege. This critical year had at all events commenced favourably. Fortune smiled upon her play. The superstitious followed her lead; report magnified her winnings; and even the

impassive countenances of the croupiers relaxed when she appeared at the tables. The dark, stern-faced Englishman who was to be seen constantly at her side, became an object of comment. His good fortune was identified with her favours. Outsiders, with a whimsical belief in the superstition which had become attached to her name, waited with curiosity till the critical moment should arrive when luck should turn and the Vampire's thirst be appeased. A tragedy was confidently predicted by the ghouls who scent disaster from afar. Warrender's infatuation was much discussed, and Madame Fano's apparent unconsciousness of the sinister expectations which she excited, was only adduced as a proof of her insensibility.

Cazalette held aloof, never playing at the tables, taking no active part in the drama, but watching Varuna closely. Not less was his attention bestowed upon Warrender, whose society he now assiduously cultivated. The

latter began to repent his first feeling of aversion. Apparently to no one could the term adventurer be less justly applied than to Cazalette. With the dignitaries of Church and State, English and foreign, he seemed equally at home. His circle of acquaintance was large and ranged the social scale. A charming ex-actress had taken a villa near Villefranche, and considered her informal entertainments failures without his presence. The Princess Titchakoff—who occupied a most luxurious suite of rooms at the Grand Hôtel, and divided the honours of notoriety in Monaco with the *prima donna*, Madame Fano, a London professional beauty, and a female Communist lately returned from New Caledonia—patronised and petted him, and, it was said, sought to lure him into the vortex of political intrigue. To be the friend of Nadine was perhaps a doubtful distinction. Yes! but to be the associate of Père Hyacinthe, who was lecturing at Nice, of Monseigneur, the

Cardinal who under the Papal benediction had established himself for health's sake at Mentone, and of an English statesman, driven to seek distraction and repose on the Riviera, was a surer seal of respectability.

The faint suggestion of rivalry in their relations with Madame Fano had completely faded from Warrender's mind. Had he analysed his feelings, this vague jealousy might have been a revelation, but in a conversation at Cape Martin she herself had removed the impression before it had had time to assume definite shape.

Notwithstanding the gaieties that made calls upon their time, there were many hours in which Warrender and Madame Fano found themselves companions. She seemed to seek rather than to avoid these opportunities, and told him with the sweetest frankness that his society did her good. Strange to say, as their intimacy increased, their talk flowed in more impersonal channels. It was not without motive

that he thus directed it. Reference to himself usually led to the subject of Helena, and from this, without knowing why, he shrank with inexpressible repugnance. He winced at the sound of her name upon Varuna's lips, and dreaded her appearance mid surroundings which in the case of her sister did not shock his sensibilities. For one of the strongest proofs of Varuna's witchery lay in her power to sway the mood of the moment, in the minds of those with whom she came in contact, and of identifying, as it were, all outward incongruities with her own charming personality ; so that though Warrender yearned to rescue her from influences which he felt to be contaminating, and associations incompatible with his ideal of purest womanhood, she yet inspired him with the firmest belief in her capacity for all that is most high and noble.

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